

# Australia's Homeless Youth

A Report of the National Youth Commission  
Inquiry into Youth Homelessness

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## Preface

The National Youth Commission Inquiry into Youth Homelessness (NYC) was an independent community inquiry funded by the Caledonia Foundation, a private philanthropic foundation focused on sustainable futures for young Australians. Caledonia's involvement in the NYC represents a bold philanthropic commitment to effect significant change for young people beyond the more traditional charitable funding of projects and property. Alongside the NYC Inquiry, a major feature documentary, *The Oasis*, was made by the award-winning documentary production company Shark Island Productions. Homeless young people participated in the film for over two years, courageously sharing their life experiences. Hopefully, both the NYC Inquiry report and the documentary film, in different but complementary ways, will shine new light on the issue of youth homelessness in Australia. We have reached a turning point in time, that will either be seen as a watershed for change or an opportunity lost forever.

The NYC Inquiry report has been a truly collective effort, drawing on evidence from 319 individuals, including some young people, who provided evidence to the National Youth Commission during 21 public hearings held around Australia. The Inquiry received 91 written submissions, including submissions from the Victorian Department of Human Services, the New South Wales Department of Housing, the Western Australian Department of Community Development, a joint submission from the Departments of Health and Community Services, Local Government, Housing and Sport and Chief Minister in the Northern Territory, and a detailed letter of support from the Queensland Government. Important assistance was rendered to the NYC by the organisations affiliated to the National Youth Coalition for Housing (NYCH), Homelessness Australia and the Council to Homeless Persons (CHP) in Victoria, who all widely promoted the Inquiry, assisted its work and contributed their considerable expertise and good ideas.

The problems identified are broadly similar to what was reported in the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission Inquiry in 1989. Significantly, since that Inquiry, the Australian economy has improved substantially, yet there are more homeless young people. When Commissioner Brian Burdekin conducted the earlier inquiry, he remarked on the 'lack of research'. In 2008, we can report that this deficit has been significantly addressed. Why is youth homelessness more of a problem in 2008 than it was twenty years ago? What can be done about it? Our approach has been firmly solution-focused in an attempt to ensure that in twenty years, another inquiry will not report that youth homelessness is still a disturbing problem in Australian society – that would be admission of an extraordinary failure.

Many people have assisted this Inquiry, both formally and informally. As we travelled throughout Australia we sensed and observed that many ordinary Australians remain concerned about the plight of homeless young people and children. Compassion and goodwill far outweigh selfishness, individualism and cynicism. If our government(s) show leadership and resolve, we are convinced the community will rally behind them.

A number of experts have assisted the NYC Inquiry. Associate Professor Adam Steen from the Australian Catholic University contributed to the development of arguments about the costs and benefits of early intervention; Dr Sue Green reviewed the information and policy on care and protection; and Associate Professor Kath Hulse and Professor Terry Burke from Swinburne University provided advice on housing affordability. Professor Brian Burdekin, who headed the first independent inquiry into youth homelessness, and who launched the NYC Inquiry in March 2007, has been an inspiration for and a passionate supporter of the National Youth Commission Inquiry into Youth Homelessness from the outset.

Lastly, we express our appreciation to all the NYC staff associated directly with the Inquiry, who laboured tirelessly to achieve so much in such a short period of time: Mr Tony Ryan from Lodge Street Systems produced an innovative software application to support the writing team; Mr Adrian Kelly from Transcripts Plus produced transcripts of the hearings; the Youth Development Australia Manager Ms Yee Man Louie provided committed and highly efficient support to the NYC; Ms Kathleen Asjes supported the NYC during the hearings and Ms Louise Goebel contributed extensively throughout the work of the NYC; additional copy editing and proofing was done by Barry Gittins and Dawn Volz; finally, we especially extend our gratitude to NYC Senior Researcher/Writers Ms Tor Roxborough and Mr Dev Mukherjee, who contributed so much to the researching and writing of Australia's Homeless Youth.

National Youth Commission

2008

## Letter to the Australian Community

The National Youth Commission Inquiry into Youth Homelessness is only the second inquiry, specifically focused on homelessness, to be conducted independently of government. The first was the landmark Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Inquiry headed by Brian Burdekin in 1989. As a result of the Burdekin Report, youth homelessness became an identifiable community problem and impetus was given to some important new initiatives. However, twenty years on, 'youth homelessness' is still with us. This is despite our nation experiencing its highest level of economic prosperity since the 1970s and the lowest unemployment for several decades. Moreover, Australia is predicted to reap billions of dollars in strong tax revenues from its natural resources over the next twenty years and beyond.

We face major global challenges such as climate change and in Australia, the serious issue of water supply and usage. Issues like this require a degree of strategic and long-term bipartisan action without precedent. Social and economic problems such as 'youth homelessness' need to be on the political agenda in the same way. On behalf of homeless young Australians, we call on the Australian community to effectively eliminate youth homelessness over the next 25 years, and so enable all young Australians to contribute to and share in the social and economic benefits of our national prosperity.

2007-2008 is arguably a watershed year, coming at a time when we have the first evidence that it is possible to reduce youth homelessness, and yet, the burgeoning rental crisis and the issue of housing affordability have begun to affect the everyday lives of many Australians, particularly young people. The accumulated deficit of past under-investment in public and community housing, and an ineffective mix of housing market incentives, means that housing affordability is a major challenge for the new Federal Government, and indeed all Australian governments.

Although 'youth homelessness' received a great deal of media attention following the HREOC Inquiry report, we have to face up to the fact that young people still become homeless and that youth homelessness is worse in 2008 than it was 20 years ago – the statistical evidence is that youth homelessness has doubled since Burdekin. Australia has been notable for its innovative service models, with some of the most creative and advanced models of homeless services to be found anywhere, yet for a long time, there has not been the political will to make the necessary social investment to begin reducing and ultimately eliminate youth homelessness.

No plan can anticipate every single measure that will be required over 25 years to deal with homelessness. However, with the right policy settings and progressive investment, the goal of eliminating homelessness is achievable. For much of the past 20 years, the funding and strategies for ameliorating homelessness have been constrained. Only early intervention emerged as a new priority, but the actual resources put into this area were never enough to reach the actual number of at-risk young people in need. Several

states have attempted homelessness strategies and this more systematic approach surely points the way forward. The test of whether youth homelessness is being substantially redressed will not be evident in national statistical data for at least five years and more likely ten years. Not everything that needs to be done can be done in a few short years – it takes time to plan, to train youth and social workers, and to implement new initiatives. The new Federal government has made ‘homelessness’ a priority issue. A new era of Commonwealth and state and territory cooperation has been foreshadowed. In the current Australian economic context, the acid test of success will be not in the absolute amount of funding for ‘youth homelessness’ over the first term of the new Government, but whether or not the right policy settings have been put in place, with a commitment to progressively fund these strategies for the next five, ten and up to twenty years.

Practical reform to achieve new forms of ‘joined-up’ government and social programs is overdue, having rested in the ‘too hard’ basket for too long. The reform agenda will not be a simple one to enact and the inertia of existing practices and habits is considerable. However, beyond that, or perhaps as part of it, the way Australian political parties and governments have typically behaved will need to change also. On some issues – and youth homelessness is one such issue - a high degree of bipartisanship already exists, but short-term thinking in terms of four-year electoral cycles needs to give way to a larger-scale vision, long-term strategic planning and sustained implementation.

The considered view of the NYC Commissioners is that we need to discover a new discourse about ‘need’ and courageously use measures of need as the benchmarks for assessing how much public money needs to be expended on programs and initiatives. With all due regard for cost-efficiency, tackling youth homelessness will require some large amounts of public funds over the long-term, however, the net benefit to the Australian community of successful intervention is much greater in dollar terms than the cost of failure and inaction.

Our Inquiry gathered evidence from a wide range of informants. Thus, the National Youth Commission report and its proposals are a collective achievement of the many people who gave up time, and contributed their knowledge, experience and creative insights. We respectfully offer this report to the Australian community and to the Commonwealth and all state and territory governments, on behalf of homeless young Australians.

Major David Eldridge (NYC Chair)

Associate Professor David Mackenzie

Ms Narelle Clay A.M.

Father Wally Dethlefs

April 8, 2008

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# Roadmap for Youth Homelessness

The development and implementation of a framework and a national action plan on homelessness is imperative. One of the lessons from the past ten to fifteen years is that policy has been unevenly attended to and there has been no nationally planned approach. Despite a no-growth budget, there has been good cooperative oversight of SAAP, but JPET and Reconnect have been developed separately. There is no common data collection across all homeless programs and program decisions are not strongly coordinated.

The Roadmap for Youth Homelessness highlights the 10 ‘must do’ strategic areas for action. Implementing the core 10 points of the Roadmap would change the face of youth homelessness in Australia. This proposed new approach to youth homelessness will be a complex developmental process requiring policy multi-tasking and new ways of connecting different areas of policy and programs – but all the core ingredients need to be in play.

## 1. Develop and implement a National Framework and National Homelessness Action Plan

Australia needs a new commitment from Commonwealth, state and territory governments on homelessness, a national framework and a national action plan, including:

- A national aspirational horizon – the goal of eliminating youth homelessness by 2030;
- Appropriate structures and processes designed to work across election cycles in a bipartisan way;
- Specific targets over the short, medium and long-term;
- Strategies that set out realistically how targets will be reached;
- A youth-centred focus for service provision and programs;
- Review and public monitoring so that progress can be recognised and problems identified against the needs of homeless young people.

## 2 Affordable housing for young people

The affordable housing crisis has developed as a result of decades of policy neglect and under-funding. The NYC supports a broad affordable housing strategy as a new framework for explicitly addressing the needs of low income and disadvantaged Australians. Under this approach, there will need to be: (a) a multi-billion dollar investment in public and community housing; (b) taxation incentives to encourage affordable private rental housing, and (c) explicit policies and housing form designs and locations that facilitate access for young people. The NYC recommends:

- the development of a new national affordable housing strategy for Australia, with explicit attention to the needs of young people and in particular disadvantaged young people.

### **3 Refocus service provision on building and resourcing 'communities of services'**

The way governments and departments divide up geographical areas for funding and program delivery is confusing, contradictory and uncoordinated, with little progress since the Burdekin Report in 1989. Building 'communities of services' is a concept that will require all government departments to work towards agreed compatible geographical templates based on actual communities of people. Large Local Government Areas (LGAs) or clusters of small LGAs are probably the closest spatial unit to actual communities. Community capacity building has entered the rhetoric of the community services sector, but there is a major challenge in how it could be operationalised. Ultimately, whatever is done needs to be available to all communities in Australia. An estimated minimum funding goal of \$30 million per year would be required for a national approach to coordinating local youth service delivery. Funding should come from several Commonwealth Government departments, as well as the states and territories. This initiative will require:

- a refocus of Commonwealth and State/ Territory funding for services and programs on a common community level template;
- the provision of cross-sectoral/ cross-departmental resources to support the development of sustainable 'communities of services'.

### **4 Prevent homelessness by supporting 'at-risk' families**

If at-risk families are assisted in a flexible, practical needs-based way before they become homeless, then homelessness can be prevented. A small program known as HOME Advice has demonstrated that this is possible in 9 out of 10 cases. About one third of all SAAP clients are families with nearly 55,000 accompanying children. Preventive support to assist at-risk families using a proven model would have a major impact on the number of families entering SAAP. The HOME Advice evaluation has estimated that a conservative minimum of \$36 million would be required to develop an fully national program, but suggested more realistic funding of \$60-90 million per year. The NYC recommends that:

- the HOME Advice program be progressively expanded as a preventive response to homelessness for families at risk of becoming homeless.

### **5. Resource early intervention for at risk young people**

School-based early intervention responses for recently homeless young people, such as the Reconnect program and other related early intervention support activities, have been effective in reducing homelessness. Researchers found that the reduction in the number of homeless 12-18 year olds from 26,060 in 2001 to 21,940 in 2006 is mostly attributed to 'early intervention'. Early intervention works, but not enough is being done to have the effect it could have, so the Commonwealth Government needs to:

- treble Reconnect (from \$20 million to \$60 million per year) to reach a larger proportion

of the at-risk population and ensure that every community in the nation has sufficient early intervention capacity to impact on the number of young people at-risk of homelessness or recently homeless.

## **6. A new national approach for the care and protection of children in all states and territories**

Australia's care and protection are in crisis. The Commonwealth Government to date has had little responsibility for care and protection, which for a long time has been a state responsibility. State programs are under-resourced and leaving care support needs major redevelopment. The lack of a national cooperative approach and timid reform agendas in the face of potentially adverse media are major barriers. A courageous and radical national review of care and protection is urgent. Beyond that, it is not possible to estimate how much reform will ultimately cost, but it is likely to require a significant increase in current expenditure. Young people who have been in state care are heavily over-represented in the population of homeless young people. The NYC urges immediate action including:

- a full Human Rights and Equal Opportunity inquiry to expose the issues and develop proposals for a national response.
- a strengthening of care and protection for at-risk 12-17 year olds;
- urgent remedial attention to staff resources and incentives for experienced staff to remain in a critical but difficult area;
- leaving care support on a needs-basis for all young people exiting care and protection.

## **7 Ensure supported accommodation is accessible in all communities**

Supported accommodation (ie SAAP) remains a core component of Australia's response to homelessness and an exemplar of innovative diversity by international standards. This is despite the program being in a 'no-real-growth' position for over a decade. The homelessness sector needs strengthening to ensure that every community has the capacity for a supported accommodation response to youth homelessness. An estimate for an adequate extent of community-based supported accommodation might well be closer to \$500 million per year, than the \$348 million currently expended. It will be necessary to:

- expand supported accommodation using a national community template to ensure that every community can adequately provide supported accommodation for young people in need.

## **8 Redevelop employment, D&A and mental health programs for homeless young people**

Employment is central to a sustainable livelihood for homeless young people. A continuum of labour market support programs need to be developed which address education barriers to employment; prepare young people for training; provide vocational training; and assist young homeless people to engage with the labour market. The absence of specialist and appropriate labour market options for disadvantaged young people has ensured that homeless young people have been largely excluded from participation in the 'full-employment' Australian economy.

Existing options for drug and alcohol services or mental health services are too often unable to provide timely assistance and treatment or are unable to accommodate young people who are wanting to address their drug and alcohol issues.

Drug treatment services for young people are uneven around Australia. In Victoria, drug services are funded to a level of \$15-16 million per year. An additional \$5 million per year would achieve state-wide coverage as well as providing sufficient outreach services at current levels of need. Other states spend less than Victoria. The proposed expansion of both mental health services and drug and alcohol programs will serve not just homeless young people but any young people who need this kind of assistance. To respond in these crucial areas, the NYC calls for:

- the development a national system of accessible drug and alcohol services for young people. National funding of an estimated \$100 million would be required to deploy a system adequate to meet existing need, with an urgent need for \$20 million initially.
- the development of a national program at an estimated cost of \$25 million, to work intensively with homeless young people who have mental health issues, their families and the workers who support them.
- the construction a continuum of employment programs for homeless young people that incorporates JPET and offers appropriate foundation education, training, vocational options as well as new models of supported employment that builds new links with support and accommodation programs.

## **9 A new form of youth housing which links housing to education, training and employment programs**

An Australian version of the UK/ European Foyer youth housing model should be developed that packages accommodation with other support, particularly education and training. Other initiatives might include accommodation for homeless school students, and 'boarding school' projects linked to Indigenous communities. One third of the homeless population are young people. The NYC recommends that:

- one-third of the \$150 million committed by the Commonwealth Government on housing for homeless people should be applied to develop a new layer of youth housing for homeless young people, connected closely to education, training and employment.

## 10 Post-vention support

Returning to homelessness is common for young people because even after they find housing, problems can reoccur. Post-vention support for homeless young people would ensure that recycling back into homelessness is minimised. A new type of flexible, tailored, post-vention outreach support would ensure that young people can sustain their independent living arrangements. A fully developed national response would cost an estimated \$35–50 million per year. But, it would radically improve the outcomes of supported accommodation programs. Every homeless young person moving beyond supported accommodation should be able to access this kind of support. The NYC proposes that:

- all young people moving from SAAP into some form of independent living need to receive needs-based outreach support.

Any serious action to redress youth homelessness in Australia will require investment and strategic long-term planning. The NYC Roadmap is informed by the accumulated knowledge about homelessness formed over the past 20 years; it is do-able and it is affordable for a country such as Australia. In terms of preliminary costings, where there is existing evidence or a sufficient basis for making estimates, the NYC has made some preliminary estimates. However, these estimates exclude the costs associated with a reform of care and protection systems around Australia, and the additional services required in mental health and drug and alcohol fields to more effectively service that significant group of their clients who are homeless young people. The total cost of redressing the affordability of housing for young people could not reasonably be estimated at the time of this report, but it will require considerable public investment. Finally, the cost of reformed employment services for homeless young people have not been entered into this calculation. In terms of what can be estimated, over a decade, the total cost would be approximately \$1 billion in new money, which would amount to about \$100 million in the first term of the new Federal Government, or approximately \$20 million additional funds every year.



## Executive Summary

1. The National Youth Commission Inquiry into Youth Homelessness in 2007 was an independent community inquiry funded by The Caledonia Foundation. The NYC held 21 days of hearings in all states and territories, heard evidence from 319 individuals, received 91 written submissions including from seven government departments and held four policy forums to discuss policy issues and solutions. The NYC upholds the human rights position of the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission which conducted the first independent inquiry in 1987-89. It has extended this framework to the concept of 'social citizenship'. This means that the minimum standards of everyday life for homeless people should be the same as enjoyed by other members of the community. The terms of reference of the NYC Inquiry were six objectives that examined the problem of youth homelessness but importantly sought to develop solutions in terms of the 'adequacy of services', 'innovation', recommended 'actions to resolve and ameliorate the problem' and finally the inquiry considered what a 'new national accord' to deal seriously with this problem might look like.

2. The HREOC report in 1989, led to increased supported accommodation for young people and the IHSHY health initiative (approx \$4.4 million annually) as well as employment and training support in the form of JPET (\$19.9 million annually in 2005-6). However since the mid-nineties, there has been a stagnation of funding in real terms for areas such as supported accommodation (ie. SAAP) and over a long period of time, for public and community housing. The major new national initiative has been at the front end of early intervention with the Commonwealth Reconnect program (\$20 million annually). A second early intervention initiative by the Commonwealth was the small Family Homelessness Prevention Pilot Program. It commenced in 2001 and continued under a different name but with no increase beyond the eight agencies until 2008 (\$2.6 million annually). There have been several significant youth homelessness and early intervention initiatives by various states such as Victoria with the School Focused Youth Service, the Family Reconciliation and Mediation Program and YEETI. In Queensland there is the Youth Support Coordinators initiative (\$8 million annually).

3. Young people become homeless because of family breakdown, often stemming from parental conflicts or a collapse of their relationship with a husband/wife or partner. Some young people who are living independently become homeless because they can't afford living expenses including rent. Being homeless is unsafe, unhealthy and very stressful. Young people experiencing homelessness are not a homogenous group. They come from a range of family backgrounds, have diverse dispositions, expectations and desires, and they encounter services of varying quality. Their common needs are to have a stable home; friends; healthy nutrition; to be cared about as individuals; to have adequate

educational support; help when they need help; and reliable adults in their lives. The frustration, distress and anger expressed by many of the young people who submitted evidence indicates that Australia still struggles to meet their needs.

4. Homelessness is not 'rooflessness'. In Australia, it is widely accepted that homelessness should be broadly defined as being without shelter, in an improvised dwelling, in any form of temporary shelter including SAAP services or a temporary stay with a friend or acquaintance and residence in single rooms in boarding houses without facilities or security of tenure. In the ABS Census 2001, there were 100,000 homeless people - men, women and children - one third (36,173) were young people aged from 12 - 24 years of age. There were another 9,941 children under the age of 12. Both structural and individual factors cause homelessness for young people. The latest statistics in 2006 reveal 21,940 homeless teenagers aged 12-18, a decline from 26,060 in 2001. This drop has been attributed to the totality of early intervention between 2001 and 2006, not the decline in youth unemployment since the early nineties. On the other hand, the crisis in housing affordability and increased pressure on state care systems are factors that tend to drive homelessness upwards. In 2005-06, in terms of homeless people using SAAP services, 35.5 per cent of clients or 36,700 young Australians were young people. There was also an additional 54,700 children accompanying an adult(s). Turnaway rates as measured by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare show that about half of the of potential clients of SAAP are not able to be accommodated on any night.

5. Youth homelessness does not involve a particular type of young person but a process of events that happen in a young person's life. The 'youth homeless career' is a typology of that process for young people, tracing the main changes that can occur following family breakdown. Young adults can become homeless when their relationship with a partner fails and they lose their accommodation because they are forced to leave the family home. Or, some young people can become homeless due to accumulating debt and a financial crisis resulting in loss of housing. Melbourne University's Project i examined the experiences of homeless young people in close detail in a longitudinal study of pathways through homelessness. The focus on 'careers' and pathways sensitises policy decision-makers about when to intervene and distinguishes different interventions along a time dimension. The emergence of 'early intervention' was bound up with the understanding of homelessness as a process.

6. Young people become homeless when primary family relationships breakdown. For young adults living independently, it will be the breakdown of the family unit they have formed that precipitates homelessness. The role of family in youth homelessness is much the same picture as presented in *Our Homeless Children*, some 20 years ago. Family breakdown is a broad term that includes such issues as mental illness, domestic violence, neglect, overcrowding, and generational poverty. Young people whose family support has broken down, leading to them going into state care, are particularly vulnerable to becoming homeless. However, when young people first become homeless, their friends and their friends' families often provide shelter and support. This is referred to by the



vernacular term 'couch-surfing'. Where young people have extended family members, grandmothers or aunts and uncles often try to help. Without resources and support, these informal social support networks typically breakdown. Young families with young children are a significant sub-group in the homeless population, with some 55,000 children passing through SAAP services in a year. The capacity to work with young homeless mothers or couples and their children needs to be improved systemically and a major prevention response must be implemented for families deemed at-risk of homelessness.

7. Homelessness is the most extreme form of poverty. In turn, living in poverty is one of the structural factors that leads to becoming homeless. While there has been a debate about how to measure poverty, the general consensus is that some 10 per cent of the population live in poverty relative to the rest of the community and the costs and living standards of Australia. In this category are Indigenous people, many single parents, and people who are long-term employed.

8. The Australian labour market has changed considerably over twenty years. Unemployment has come down. Unemployment is at record lows, including unemployment rates for young people, although for 15-19 year-old the rate is still 12 per cent). Full-time work has remained steady, while part-time and casual jobs have increased. Many students also work. For homeless young people, taking advantage of the improved labour market is problematic. Being without stable accommodation is itself a major barrier, because a young person cannot do the normal things employees do, like wearing clean clothes and washing regularly. Transport can be a problem, while lack of skills due to early school leaving and a general unpreparedness for work are also issues. For homeless young people with high and complex needs, employment may not be the highest priority in their lives, as they deal with cycles of mental health or drug and alcohol problems. The casualisation of the workforce and the low level of youth wages mean that employment may be tenuous. Without family support, a young person can easily end up homeless again. Sustained support and stable accommodation, combined with a raft of opportunities to be prepared for employment, as well as opportunities for medium-term supported employment will be required to achieve better labour market outcomes for this group.

9. Young people who have been in state care and protection are over-represented in the homeless population. In the 2006 census of homeless school students, some 15 per cent of students had been in care and protection. In Project i, about one in five of the young people entering SAAP were estimated to have been in care and protection. An RMIT study found 42 per cent of young adults and other adults in SAAP has been in care and protection. Often these young people's family situations have deteriorated before they become teenagers. They are a particularly vulnerable group. In every hearing, the systems of care and protection in the different jurisdictions were reported as being under-resourced and under-staffed. This resulted in priority allocations that focus on younger children, creating major issues of access for older youth. In a significant number

of cases, the failure of the system is a part of the problem. The Commonwealth has had little responsibility and state care systems are in crisis. The NYC has called for a Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission inquiry into care and protection in Australia, to expose the extent of the problems and provide a basis for national action. Despite some positive effort, there is an urgent need for numerous improvements, including a universal leaving care entitlement. The total investment will be considerable but it would have a major impact on youth homelessness in the medium- to long-term future.

10. Mental health issues are more prevalent among homeless youth than the overall population of young people in Australia. In some cases, mental health is implicated in a young person becoming homeless, although it may be the case that the deterioration in the mental health of other family members tips young people into homelessness. However, becoming homeless is also an unhealthy lifestyle. There is evidence that psychological and psychiatric problems may result from homelessness. When young people with mental health issues also develop substance use problems, the situation of co-morbidity (or dual diagnosis) presents major difficulties for supported accommodation services, as well as for specialist services that deal with mental health and drug and alcohol issues. Mental health is a major issue amongst chronically homeless youth with high and complex needs.

11. Drug and alcohol use by Australian young people has declined in recent years. However, many service providers report that drug and alcohol use among homeless young people has increased over twenty years. The wider availability of stimulants such as ICE has meant that the type of substances being used has shifted somewhat. The origins of drug and alcohol use are diverse: sometimes it is from a permissive family situation, as self-medication of mental health conditions, or, more commonly, as a practice acquired by contact with other young people who are homeless. There are serious consequences for homeless youth with drug and alcohol use problems, including gaining access to supported accommodation or remaining in accommodation. SAAP agencies reported difficulty obtaining timely specialist help for their clients. Continued drug use can further harm some already worsening yet important relationships in young people's lives and lead to petty crime that ultimately involves them with police and the criminal justice system.

12. Indigenous young people are more likely to experience homelessness than non-Indigenous youth. Although in many ways the drivers of homelessness are similar, there are some significant differences. Indigenous Australians have been described as suffering 'spiritual homelessness' which stems from dispossession and forced removal from homelands and family. A major cultural difference with the mainstream of the community and other groups is the extended family network and the obligations that belonging to such a kinship network implies. Overcrowding is common, leading to stressful conflicts. There is an increased transience as a result of moving from more remote locations to urban centres and to visit extended family members. Also, the rate of

early school leaving has an impact on drug and alcohol abuse-fuelled violence on young people, which is a driver of Indigenous youth homelessness. Indigenous young people are over represented in the justice system; they have difficulty accessing appropriate services. Their health outcomes are poor and they experience educational and employment disadvantage. The NYC calls for explicit attention to the needs of young people in all national initiatives directed to Indigenous communities. Indigenous youth workers and 'boarding school' settings connected to Indigenous communities are two practical measures for consideration.

13. Schools and the education system have become important sites for early intervention to assist homeless and at-risk students. Community agencies work more closely with schools than they ever did in the early nineties in the aftermath of the HREOC report. School welfare staff have become an important part of the early intervention response. However, school welfare resources and the school welfare staff available are unevenly distributed across Australia and the NYC seeks to establish appropriate national standards. There are still problems of school exclusion when schools are confronted by young people displaying 'challenging behaviours' due to family problems. Where family reconciliation and mediation is undertaken, good results are possible in many cases - but not all. Reconnect is a highly successful early intervention program but not all communities have a Reconnect service and only about one third of students deemed to be most at risk, are currently being reached. Students who become homeless receive more help than in the past but remain very vulnerable to not completing school. Alternative education settings should be made available as important options for some students.

14. A major component of Australia's homelessness service system will continue to be supported accommodation for homeless young people. The demand for supported accommodation is excessive; about one in every two young people who seek accommodation on a night are turned away. Only some 14 per cent of the homeless population can be accommodated in SAAP on any night. The transition out of homelessness to independent living has been restricted due to long wait times for public housing and steeply rising rents. Teenagers may not be ready to take on full responsibility for living independently. Many services believe that supported accommodation has lost a major degree of flexibility to meet the varied needs of young clients. For over a decade SAAP funding has been increased at less than the real rise in the costs of providing support services for homeless people. Every Australian community should have the capacity to provide supported accommodation and associated services for homeless young people.

15. After leaving home, young people often return home at different times before re-entering private rental accommodation. This is normal, but for a young person without that option, a breakdown in their housing situation may well lead to homelessness. Returning home may be possible for teenagers following mediation or family reconciliation, but it is not always the most likely nor the most desirable outcome. During the hearings and in submissions, issues were raised about transitional accommodation. Some young

people are not ready for such independent living. Access to fully independent rental accommodation is difficult and the level of support that many young people need is not available. SAAP agencies are not resourced to provide extensive post-SAAP support, although workers know how important this can be. The idea of post-SAAP outreach support being made available to all homeless young people moving into independent accommodation is potentially a way of improving SAAP outcomes by assisting young people to avoid another crisis and to prevent recycling back into the homelessness service system.

16. Over the past 20 years the affordability of housing has deteriorated – decreasing by 140 per cent between 1986 and 2006. In 1986, 3.6 years of average income was needed to purchase a home; by 2006 the purchase price required 7.0 years' pay. The total stock of public housing has declined and rental vacancies have reached an all-time low. Extensive media coverage in 2007 highlighted 'a crisis of affordable housing' and the issue was prominent in the 2007 Federal election. There is a strong case for a new national agreement on affordable housing that is broader than the current Commonwealth-States Housing Agreement, and the needs of young people should be explicitly addressed under any new agreement. There needs to be a real net increase in the investment in public and community housing; and in the short-term, the NYC has argued for education, training and employment linked housing in the form of Foyers and other similar models.

17. There is a clear link between homelessness and a series of health issues. Mental health issues and drug and alcohol addictions and substance abuse are experienced by a significant group of young people in the homeless population, and often co-occur. Family breakdown is often accompanied by trauma, grief and a disturbed emotional state. Being homeless involves a lifestyle with many health risks. Youth-specific health services, many designed under the Innovative Health Services for Homeless Young People (IHSY) program, have been demonstrably successful. The gaps in drug and alcohol and mental health services for young people particularly affect homeless youth, where obtaining stable accommodation is necessary for progress in any longer-term health treatments. Current systems have difficulty in handling young people with high and complex needs and co-morbidity. Regional, rural and remote health care problems are due to sparse populations, large distances and the higher costs of providing services. The NYC recommends that the successes of the IHSY be extended more broadly to achieve a rational national deployment of services tailored to the needs of homeless young people.

18. The perception of street-frequenting homeless youth as a threat is a misconception derived from their visibility and their sometimes loud and boisterous behaviour in public spaces. Homeless young people are often the victims of crime rather than the perpetrators. But trapped in chronic homelessness and without stable accommodation for long periods of time, these young people end up engaging in petty crime – public transport fare evasion, offensive language, failure to obey a police order to move on, shop-lifting etc – to survive. The penalties levelled at homeless young for transport fare

evasion create conflict and make a homeless young people's situation even worse. The relationship between homeless youth and police, was uneven. In some places it was a source of conflict and antagonism, while in other places there have been programs to improve policing on the streets. However, the situation for homeless young people is ripe for escalation and conflict. Street youth, in particular, face greater discrimination from landlords and other businesses because of the way they present and the stigma of being homeless. If homelessness continues, then the chances of legal complications increase, raising a concern about the inadequate support for young people in these situations.

19. Homeless young people are entirely dependent on Government income support. The Youth Allowance is designed to support full-time students and unemployed young people. The 'unreasonable to live at home' criteria provides additional support for homeless young people. The bureaucratic requirements of identification and evidence present barriers for homeless young people, demonstrated by the number of young people who enter SAAP services with no income support in place. For young people under the age of 15, the youth protocol sets down who is responsible for the younger homeless. But in practice many 12-15 year olds do not receive priority attention from their state or territory care and protection services and duly turn up in SAAP services. The level of income support available to homeless young people is insufficient for the costs of living independently: this needs review, as does inadequate rental assistance in a market where rents are rising steeply. The administration of benefits using 'breaching' causes many consequential problems. Compliance for homeless and at-risk young people should be approached differently.

20. Unemployment has decreased to the lowest level for decades and the Australian economy is experiencing difficulty getting enough skilled workers in some sectors. However, homeless young people have difficulty accessing the labour market even when there are semi-skilled jobs for which they might qualify. Evidence was provided that Job Network generally does not service the needs of highly disadvantaged young people appropriately and that Work for the Dole is a poorly conceived work experience model. The JPET program was discussed as having positive aspects but changes from one department to another and the refocusing on employment outcomes has degraded JPET's value for homeless young people. An under-estimation of the issues that many homeless young people face and the effort required to overcome them underpins much of the poor policy in this area. Major reform is needed to link education, training and employment program with accommodation and other supports.

21. There is no agreed common national approach for ensuring that communities have sufficient capacity to respond to homelessness and related issues. Different programs and departments use different geographical boundaries and community agencies often complain that combined funding is positive but encumbered with onerous financial accountability requirements to the different departments that dispense funds. The idea

of 'communities of services' implies active community building with some resources devoted to facilitating better coordination of local systems. Informal youth networks exist in places, and some of them have survived without funding for many years. The Victorian School Focused Youth Service and the Queensland Youth Support Coordinators program have invested resources to build cooperative networks on the ground. The NYC, reiterating the stance taken in previous reports on the issue of community coordination, suggests that the best means of building cross-sectoral communities of services be investigated and trialled so a broader national initiative can be developed in the future.

22. Cost-benefit and cost-effectiveness information about youth homelessness is limited in Australia. Pinkney and Ewing (1998) estimated that the long-term economic cost to the community, of not assisting the estimated 25,000 students who experience homelessness in a year would be 'in excess of half a billion dollars per year'. The largest part of this estimated amount is the cost of educational disadvantage, supplemented by the costs to the community of ill-health and involvement in the criminal justice system. Pinkney and Ewing estimated a cost-benefit break-even point where only one in five young people are successfully helped to avoid long-term homelessness. Using the same methodology, but considering the 50,000 children who pass through SAAP services each year, the long-term cost to Australia of not successfully assisting young people to avoid homelessness might be closer to \$1 billion per year. The average cost of prevention and early intervention for families and children was \$3,079 per family, compared to the \$3,130 unit cost for SAAP, which, if capital and maintenance of housing costs are included, could be as high as \$8,500. On the existing evidence, actual budget costs to government of redressing homelessness are considerably less than the long-term cost to the community of not doing so. Providing prevention and early intervention measures for young people or families is cheaper than the assistance required once they have become homeless.

23. At the time of the NYC Inquiry, there was research evidence that youth homelessness had decreased somewhat from 2001 to 2006 due to early intervention. However, in 2006 and 2007 the affordability of housing became a major issue as private rents rose steeply and vacancy rates reached record lows. The NYC Inquiry in 2007-08 took place at a watershed point. Homelessness has been highlighted by the new Federal Government as a priority issue for action under the policy mantra of 'social inclusion'. The NYC believes that if the right policy settings are put in place and Australia makes a sustained investment in a continuum of measures from prevention, to early intervention, crisis intervention and then post-vention reconnection to community, it is possible to change the face of 'youth homelessness' in this country. The NYC urges a constructivist approach: we need an appropriately robust and sufficiently bipartisan structure and process, equal to the tasks we will need to tackled over the long-term. The NYC proposes a ROADMAP of 10 essential strategic actions: a national framework and a national plan of action; a refocus on building 'communities

of services' in actual communities across Australia; increased affordable housing for young people; an expanded Reconnect early intervention response for at-risk young people; prevention of homelessness for families and children; a national reform agenda for care and protection; supported accommodation in communities; new models and funded cooperative links between specialist health, drug and alcohol and employment services; a new foyer-like form of youth housing and, finally, post-vention support for young people who are re-establishing their lives in the community.

## NYC Recommendations

The recommendations in this report are located chapters where the salient information and argument is presented. Most recommendations are in Chapters 12 to 20 dealing with responses to youth homelessness and in Chapters 21 to 23 which deal with broader systems issues. The exceptions are Chapter 6 on Families in crisis and Chapter 9 on Care and Protection, where a number of recommendations are presented on what needs to be done in these areas.

### FAMILY

#### Recommendation 6.1

The NYC Inquiry recommends that the Commonwealth Government progressively expand the HOME Advice program as a preventive response for families at-risk of becoming homeless to at least \$60 million per year.

#### Recommendation 6.2

The NYC Inquiry recommends that the needs of young families who are homeless be addressed within the youth homelessness service system by providing services designed to support this group and/or specialist support workers who can work with pregnant mothers, young families with young children and children.

### CARE AND PROTECTION

#### Recommendation 9.1

The NYC Inquiry recommends that the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission [HREOC] consider a national inquiry into care and protection. The Inquiry should:

- review policy and practice on care and protection from a human rights perspective;
- consider new Federal-state cooperative programs and initiatives, especially early intervention and prevention in terms of family and community support;
- advise on what reforms, structures and processes are required;
- provide advice on how change might best be implemented and the scale of reforms and resources needed.

#### Recommendation 9.2

The NYC Inquiry recommends that the Federal Government become a partner with the states and territories in reforming Australia's care and protection sector.

#### Recommendation 9.3

The NYC Inquiry recommends needs-based support for all young people leaving care. Since



not all issues are present at the point of leaving statutory care, support should be accessible on a flexible basis at any time up to 24 years of age and under exceptional circumstances outside that age range.

#### **Recommendation 9.4**

The NYC Inquiry recommends that all jurisdictions identify and fund models of exemplary practice to significantly improve the capacity of the care and protection system to meet the complex needs of young people in the areas of accommodation, education and mental health.

#### **Recommendation 9.5**

The NYC Inquiry recommends that all jurisdictions urgently review the level of funding provided to their care and protection programs, and develop a remedial strategy for addressing the selection, training and support of staff as well as the real need for care and protection services in the community.

#### **Recommendation 9.6:**

The NYC Inquiry recommends that community placement models, including support to families supporting 'couch-surfers', be nationally implemented, following a review of existing initiatives.

#### **Recommendation 9.7:**

The NYC Inquiry recommends that all jurisdictions support the development of a comprehensive national data collection for young people passing through care and protection, including foster care in Australia.

#### **Recommendation 9.8:**

The NYC Inquiry recommends that a national project be undertaken to develop a comprehensive suite of care and protection indicators, which would be publicly reported so that system and program performance can be adequately monitored.

## **INDIGENOUS YOUTH HOMELESSNESS**

#### **Recommendation 12.1:**

The NYC Inquiry recommends that Indigenous young peoples' needs and issues be an explicit component in all national responses for improving the social and economic conditions of Indigenous communities.

#### **Recommendation 12.2:**

The NYC Inquiry recommends that the Federal Government fund Indigenous youth workers in Indigenous communities, especially in rural and remote Australia. Funding should

cover access to training and education that leads to a youth work certificate or diploma, networking and professional supervision, as well as opportunities for ongoing skills development.

#### **Recommendation 12.3:**

The NYC Inquiry recommends that the Federal government develop 'boarding school' options for Indigenous young people, located near to Indigenous communities, where this is supported and sought by the community.

#### **Recommendation 12.4**

The NYC Inquiry recommends that Australian governments commit to effective consultation with Indigenous communities to determine whether services delivered into a region can be managed locally or require collaboration with an external service provider. If the second option for a service for at-risk young people and their families is chosen, a strategy for local community capacity building should be specifically part of the service model.

## **EARLY INTERVENTION**

#### **Recommendation 13.1:**

The NYC Inquiry recommends that the Reconnect program be progressively expanded to optimally three times present capacity to provide full national coverage for at-risk young people and their families.

#### **Recommendation 13.2**

The NYC Inquiry recommends that the Australian Government together with the states and territories conduct a national review of the provision of student welfare services in both primary and secondary schools. The review should:

- provide a detailed audit report on the extent of student support at school level and across schools;
- identify schools on a hierarchy of need and risk;
- examine the issue of qualifications and experience for student welfare staff;
- compare student support across states and territories;
- propose national standards for student welfare services in schools.

#### **Recommendation 13.3:**

The NYC Inquiry recommends that Australian government-funded public and private secondary schools be required under a policy guideline agreed by all departments of education to participate in initiatives for the community coordination of youth services.

#### **Recommendation 13.4:**

The NYC Inquiry recommends that all jurisdictions develop clear student well-being policies, form a dedicated central leadership team on student well-being matters, issue explicit operational requirements for school principals and councils, including reporting on school

leaving and social issues for departmental monitoring as well as accountability to the community.

**Recommendation 13.5:**

The NYC Inquiry recommends that the Australian Government commissions a national at-risk assessment of students in primary and secondary schools and develops a tool and a mechanism that will allow the benchmark data to be updated regularly if not annually.

**Recommendation 13.6**

The NYC Inquiry recommends that the Federal, state and territory governments develop a data collection on social indicators for schools, such as:

- the number of young people who fail to progress from primary school into secondary school;
- information on school suspensions and exclusions, both formal and informal;
- the number of young people leaving schools before completing Year 12;
- the reasons why young people leave school;
- demographic information about early school leavers.

**Recommendation 13.7:**

The NYC Inquiry recommends that the Australian Government undertakes a project to assess the needs of schools based on actual student and family level data and real-time monitoring rather than ABS area data based on the location of a school, which often underestimates the need of students in particular schools.

**Recommendation 13.8:**

The NYC Inquiry recommends that the issue of transition from primary to secondary school for Indigenous students and early school leaving be addressed as a specific strategy by state and territory governments, with additional support and funding from the Australian Government.

## **SUPPORTED ACCOMMODATION**

**Recommendation 14.1:**

The NYC Inquiry recommends the needs of homeless young people be documented at the community level, where a community is taken to broadly correspond with Local Government Areas (or clusters of smaller LGAs) boundaries, using ABS homelessness data, SAAP client data, and consultations with local stakeholders to draw on local knowledge.

**Recommendation 14.2**

The NYC Inquiry recommends that the Commonwealth and state and territory governments expand supported accommodation, using an agreed geographical template, to ensure that every community has sufficient resources to adequately respond to homelessness and the needs of young people who become homeless.

**Recommendation 14.3:**

The NYC Inquiry recommends that the next review or evaluation of SAAP be required as part of its brief to examine the profile of community capacity for supported accommodation in all jurisdictions and report on the community level gaps between client need and program capacity.

**Recommendation 14.4:**

The NYC Inquiry recommends increased funding for supported accommodation to address the gaps between client need and service provision capacity.

**Recommendation 14.5:**

The NYC Inquiry recommends that funding for supported accommodation services include adequate provision for indexation in order that direct service provision capacity is maintained.

**Recommendation 14.6:**

The NYC Inquiry recommends that the funding and resources provided for supported accommodation be increased in line with salary levels equitable with other comparable human service positions, as well as being able to address working conditions, occupational health and safety, staff training and professional development, in order to ensure the homelessness service system's stability and viability over the long-term.

**Recommendation 14.7:**

The NYC Inquiry recommends that the importance of capital funding for properties be recognised and that capital funding for homelessness services be increased to ensure an adequate level of properties for crisis, medium- and long-term accommodation.

**Recommendation 14.8**

The NYC Inquiry recommends that appropriate responses and strategies for high and complex needs clients be developed and resourced, that provide lower staff-client ratios, and funds to buy in specialist support, as well as funding for new joined up models that enable access to health, drug and alcohol, mental health, education, training and employment services.

**Recommendation 14.9:**

The NYC Inquiry recommends that more training on mental health, drug and alcohol and suicide prevention be available to generalist workers in supported accommodation.

**Recommendation 14.10**

The NYC Inquiry recommends that working with at-risk and homeless Indigenous young people be adopted as a priority within a National Homelessness Action Plan.

## **POST-SAAP TRANSITION**

### **Recommendation 15.1:**

The NYC Inquiry recommends that state and territory housing authorities together with the Australian Government fund a progressive increase in public and community housing stock suitable for young people.

### **Recommendation 15.2**

The NYC Inquiry recommends that state and territory housing authorities together with the Australian Government develop and fund initiatives for new models of youth housing that combine education, training and employment with a package of accommodation and support. These might include approaches such as the Foyer model, or accommodation closely linked with schools and other education and training programs, as an urgent short-term supply side youth housing contribution.

### **Recommendation 15.3:**

The NYC Inquiry recommends that one third of the \$150 million for housing for the homeless, promised by the Labor Party in the 2007 Federal election campaign, be allocated by the Federal Government to housing for homeless youth.

### **Recommendation 15.4:**

The NYC Inquiry recommends that all SAAP youth services be funded for an outreach support worker specifically designated to provide needs-based support to former clients who have moved to independent accommodation.

### **Recommendation 15.5:**

The NYC Inquiry recommends that family mediation or counselling for all homeless young people in supported accommodation be considered for national implementation, with an allocation of brokerage funds according to specific individual client needs.

### **Recommendation 15.6:**

The NYC Inquiry recommends that the amount of medium and long-term housing stock be expanded across Australia with an appropriate balance between crisis and medium-, long-term, and transitional accommodation.

### **Recommendation 15.7**

The NYC Inquiry recommends that all jurisdictions review the provision of support for young people moving beyond crisis services into SAAP medium and long-term accommodation.

## **HOUSING**

### **Recommendation 16.1:**

The NYC Inquiry recommends that the Australian Government undertake a wide-ranging

review of the social and economic policy settings that have contributed to the housing affordability crisis. The review should suggest a long-term strategic approach to growing the public, community and private housing sectors with projections of the extent of public investment required over at least the next 10 years to ensure sustainable housing affordability.

**Recommendation 16.2:**

The NYC Inquiry recommends that the current Commonwealth-States Housing Agreement be replaced by a National Affordable Housing Agreement which includes public housing but also deals with broader issues of affordability in terms of public-private community housing and the development of private rental housing for low income individuals and families.

**Recommendation 16.3:**

The NYC Inquiry recommends that the Australian Government consider tax incentives for private investment in affordable housing projects for low-income individuals and families.

**Recommendation 16.4:**

The NYC Inquiry recommends that the Australian Government urgently develop a significant new stock of affordable housing for young people based on an Australian version of the Foyer Model as well as exploring other education, training and employment related housing models as a significant component of long-term housing provision for young people.

**RECOMMENDATION 16.5:**

The NYC inquiry recommends that additional funds be provided to enable the states and territories to acquire and build additional public housing stock for young people.

**RECOMMENDATION 16.6:**

The NYC Inquiry recommends that the Crisis Accommodation Program guidelines be extended to allow for the urgent provision of medium and long-term supported accommodation for young people and that funding levels be significantly increased to meet these new objectives.

**RECOMMENDATION 16.7:**

The NYC Inquiry recommends that the Australian Government and state and territory jurisdictions consider how local government could be more involved in the development of affordable housing through the implementation of appropriate local planning policies. Additional funds will need to be allocated to facilitate the development of capacity in local government.

**RECOMMENDATION 16.8:**

The NYC Inquiry recommends that Commonwealth Rental Assistance be continued but reviewed with a view to considering adjustments that take account of regional differences in

private rental markets.

## **HEALTH**

### **Recommendation 17.1:**

The NYC Inquiry recommends that the Innovative Health Services for Homeless Youth (IHSY) program be continued and further developed as an important component of a national homelessness service system in order to provide more and better health services for at-risk, disadvantaged and homeless young Australians.

### **Recommendation 17.2:**

The NYC Inquiry recommends that flexible, non-judgemental ante-natal and post-natal outreach based support services be implemented in major population centres for pregnant and parenting young women.

### **Recommendation 17.3:**

The NYC Inquiry recommends that a national network of youth substance abuse services be established across all jurisdictions to provide an appropriate range of services that are sufficiently funded to meet current levels of need.

### **Recommendation 17.4:**

The NYC Inquiry recommends that all jurisdictions review the provision of mental health services for young people in terms of access, service gaps, wait times and operational efficiency in order to adequately resource support programs for young people with mental health issues and their families.

### **Recommendation 17.5:**

The NYC Inquiry recommends that new models of residential programs be developed and funded which enable drug and alcohol, youth mental health and supported accommodation services to work in partnership to support homeless young people with a dual diagnosis.

## **CRIME AND JUSTICE**

### **Recommendation 18.1:**

The NYC Inquiry recommends that state and territory jurisdictions convene a review of the various laws that apply to behaviour in public space and how these laws affect young people, especially homeless young people.

### **Recommendation 18.2**

The NYC Inquiry recommends that youth and police community liaison committees be given a role to monitor issues between young people in public spaces and police and how policing

practices impact on young people.

**Recommendation 18.3:**

The NYC Inquiry recommends that state and territory jurisdictions extend diversionary practices that prevent homeless young people being placed on remand in custody because they cannot afford bail.

**Recommendation 18.4:**

The NYC Inquiry recommends that state and territory jurisdictions give particular attention to diversionary practices to prevent Indigenous young people being placed on remand in custody.

**Recommendation 18.5:**

The NYC Inquiry recommends that Centrelink issue a means tested 'youth card', which would carry certain entitlements such as free or concession fares on public transport, as a way of reducing fines and punitive outcomes.

**Recommendation 18.6:**

The NYC Inquiry recommends that stronger post-release programs be put in place for young people leaving juvenile justice or adult correctional facilities to prevent an offender becoming homeless after release. Such programs should involve:

- Case management support;
- Brokerage funds;
- Accommodation;
- Follow-up for at least 12 months;
- A client data collection system so that the effectiveness of these measures can be monitored.

## **INCOME**

**Recommendation 19.1:**

The NYC Inquiry recommends that the total benefit for a young person who is homeless be equivalent to the adult Newstart allowance.

**Recommendation 19.2:**

The NYC Inquiry recommends that more weight be accorded to the professional assessment of service providers as to whether a young person is eligible for the 'unable to live at home' level of benefit.

**Recommendation 19.3**

The NYC Inquiry recommends that the emergency special benefit be payable to young people under the age of 15 years and their carers until an appropriate determination of child



protection issues and placement can be achieved.

**Recommendation 19.4:**

The NYC Inquiry recommends that the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) 'participation compliance' policy be reviewed to ensure more appropriate responses to the income support needs of homeless young people.

**Recommendation 19.5:**

The NYC Inquiry recommends that financial circumstances and homelessness be considered relevant factors in discretionary decisions about any sanctions applying to the administration of Centrelink benefits.

**Recommendations 19.6**

The NYC Inquiry recommends that national policy on youth homelessness establishes a different balance between rent assistance, supported accommodation and public and community housing to effect a lower reliance on rental assistance and greater access to affordable public and community housing stock.

**Recommendation 19.7**

The NYC Inquiry recommends that a review of the level of rental assistance available to homeless young people be undertaken, with consideration given to a higher level of payment adjusted to state and regional rental variations.

## **EMPLOYMENT**

**Recommendation 20.1:**

The NYC Inquiry recommends that foundation education, job preparation, training and job creation be embedded as part of the coordinated response to youth homelessness.

**Recommendation 20.2:**

The NYC Inquiry recommends the Jobs Placement, Education and Training Program [JPET] be refocused as a pre-employment program to help homeless young people overcome the social barriers to their participation in education, training or employment, and expanded to more adequately reach the number of homeless young people who need this kind of assistance.

**Recommendation 20.3**

The NYC Inquiry recommends that foundation education, job preparation, training and job creation be linked in a package to the provision of accommodation and support. This would include youth housing such as Foyer housing, or similar models, which need to be closely linked with SAAP services.

#### Recommendation 20.4

The NYC Inquiry recommends that supported employment be available for up to two years for homeless or at-risk young people with high and/or complex needs. Supported employment would involve:

- a case worker available to support both the young person and his/her employer;
- appropriate employer linked subsidies;
- a capacity to liaise with employers to negotiate job placements under the supported employment program.

#### Recommendation 20.5

The NYC Inquiry recommends that innovation funds be made available for the development of not-for-profit businesses that employ homeless young people and provide services and products to the general community. The primary purpose of these businesses would be to provide real employment experiences for at-risk and homeless young people, who are not ready for employment in the broader labour market.

#### Recommendation 20.6

The NYC Inquiry recommends that the transitions of young people from school to post-school employment options be supported by a national case management program providing transition assistance on an individual needs basis.

### COORDINATION

#### Recommendation 21.1

The NYC Inquiry recommends that the Commonwealth Government, together with the state and territory governments, develop a 'community of services' model to support community level coordination and cross-sectoral collaboration across all issues affecting young people. This would need to involve all community sector stakeholders, including schools, in a sustainable network of youth services.

#### Recommendation 21.2

The NYC Inquiry recommends that the Commonwealth Government in cooperation with state and territory governments undertake a community youth coordination model research and development project. The project would:

- Survey comprehensively all initiatives on coordination of youth services;
- Undertake model development workshops with agencies and schools;
- Develop a theoretical model for a sustainable 'community of services';
- Consider how recurrent cross-sectoral department funding could be applied to a national network of LGA-based 'community of services' approach;
- Advise on the budgetary implications of developmental funds and the recurrent

funding that would be required to support a viable 'community of services' network at the local level.

## **COSTS AND BENEFITS**

### **Recommendation 22.1**

The NYC Inquiry recommends that national policy on youth homelessness address the unmet need for early intervention and prevention responses for at-risk and homeless young people.

### **Recommendation 22.2**

The NYC Inquiry recommends that a longitudinal cost-benefit study of homeless young people be undertaken.

### **Recommendation 22.3**

The NYC Inquiry recommends that an independent cost-effectiveness study be undertaken of the different models of early intervention for homeless young people and their families as well as supported accommodation for young people in SAAP.

## **SYSTEMS AND STRATEGIES**

### **Recommendation 23.1**

The NYC Inquiry recommends that the Australian Government and state and territory governments commit to developing a long-term strategy and action plan to eliminate homelessness in Australia.

### **Recommendation 23.2**

The NYC Inquiry recommends that the Australian Government and state and territory governments create properly resourced compatible data collections across all programs, both Federal and state, that assist homeless people. At the same time, a homelessness identifier should be incorporated in other social programs.

### **Recommendation 23.3**

The NYC Inquiry recommends that the Australian Government and state and territory governments form a National Homelessness Taskforce as a vehicle for developing a national homelessness framework as well as a national strategy and action plan.

### **Recommendation 23.4**

The NYC Inquiry recommends that a Federal Government Social Inclusion Unit focus on developing a reform agenda for how joined-up government and joined-up policy can be

undertaken in an effective and sustainable way across departments and jurisdictions to assist young people who are homeless.

#### Recommendation 23.5

The NYC Inquiry recommends that the public administration of all programs for homeless young people be reviewed with a view to improving program administration and cost planning for service provision.

The review should address:

- Improved accountability by developing more efficient and streamlined ways of collecting information and reporting on outcomes;
- Adequate real cost indexation to maintain service provision in the face of rising external costs;
- An exemption from the impact of efficiency dividends for programs catering for the most disadvantaged Australians;
- Service models that adequately allow for real cost structures such as occupational health and safety, training and professional development and community service salary scale increments;
- A minimum standard of three-year funding agreements.

# 1

The National Youth Commission into Youth Homelessness Inquiry in 2007 was an independent community inquiry funded by The Caledonia Foundation. The NYC held 21 days of hearings in all states and territories, heard evidence from 319 individuals, received 91 written submissions including from seven government departments and held four policy forums to discuss policy issues and solutions. The NYC upholds the human rights position of the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, which conducted the first independent inquiry in 1987-89. It has extended this framework to the concept of 'social citizenship'. This means that the minimum standards of everyday life for homeless people should be the same as enjoyed by other members of the community. The terms of reference of the NYC Inquiry were six objectives that examined the problem of youth homelessness but importantly sought to develop solutions in terms of the 'adequacy of services', 'innovation', recommended 'actions to resolve and ameliorate the problem' and finally the inquiry considered what a 'new national accord' to deal seriously with this problem might look like.



## Chapter 1 | National Youth Commission Inquiry into Youth Homelessness

### **The National Youth Commission**

1.1 The National Youth Commission Inquiry into Youth Homelessness was constituted under collaboration between the Caledonia Foundation and Youth Development Australia Ltd. The NYC process follows the methodology and standards set for such inquiries by the work in 1987 of the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission headed by Commissioner Brian Burdekin. As such, the NYC is the second inquiry into youth homelessness, independent of government since the HREOC Inquiry in 1987, some 20 years ago.

1.2 The Caledonia Foundation is a philanthropic foundation with a primary focus on 'areas related to the future sustainability of young Australians' - the idea of intervening helpfully before age of 20, to assist the 'advancement, wellbeing and welfare of the children and youth of Australia' in the areas of 'education and training particularly in regards to social welfare, the arts and the environment'. Youth Development Australia Ltd is a new national not-for-profit organisation dedicated to 'youth development' and in particular, to ameliorating the position of the most disadvantaged young Australians. The Caledonia Foundation provided the resources for the National Youth Commission and Youth Development Australia was responsible for the inquiry process.

### **Terms of Reference**

1.3 The Inquiry was undertaken under the following terms of reference:

- (1) To document the history of policy, programs and initiatives by Federal, State and Territory governments to assist homeless youth.
- (2) To identify the issues that prevent homeless young people from

connecting with their local community and participating in the broader society as active citizens.

(3) To draw attention to positive and negative changes affecting homeless young people since the last national independent inquiry on youth homelessness by the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission in 1989.

(4) To report on the adequacy of existing services and programs, as well as identifying innovative initiatives for responding to the needs of homeless young people.

(5) To recommend actions that should be taken by various stakeholders and government authorities to resolve and ameliorate the problem of youth homelessness within a broad policy framework from prevention to post-supported accommodation.

(6) To explore the basis for a renewed national accord between the Commonwealth and the states and territories and between government and the community on the issue of youth homelessness.

## NYC Commissioners

1.4 *Major David Eldridge* from The Salvation Army chaired the NYC Inquiry. David Eldridge has been a key figure within The Salvation Army both in Australia and the United Kingdom for over 28 years, in a variety of senior social policy and programme development roles. He headed Crossroads Youth Network for 15 years and served as Director of the Brunswick Community Programme for nearly 12 years. Major Eldridge has also been a key adviser to the Australian Government on social policy issues, particularly in relation to young people. He was the Chair of the Prime Minister's Youth Homeless Task Force that led to the Reconnect program; he served as Chair of the Commonwealth Advisory Committee on Homelessness and in 1999, headed the Commonwealth Government's Youth Pathways Action Plan Taskforce that produced the report, *Footprints to the Future*. Major Eldridge has also been influential in the development of employment policy; he was a Board member of the Employment Services Regulatory Authority, a board member of the Enterprise and Career Education Foundation and the Foundation for Young Australians.

1.5 *Associate Professor David Mackenzie* from the Institute for Social Research at Swinburne University has a strong record of research and development on issues associated with youth issues and youth policy and is internationally recognised for his research on homelessness. He is co-author (with Chris Chamberlain) of the book *Youth Homelessness: Early intervention and prevention* (1998) that outlines an early intervention policy perspective for a coordinated community infrastructure of services and schools. He has authored many reports and papers on youth and homelessness research including *Indigenous homelessness in Victoria*, *Counting The Homeless 2001* with Chris Chamberlain, and in 2007, a national evaluation report of the HOME Advice program. In the past, Associate Professor Mackenzie has served on a number



of government advisory committees and taskforces - the Commonwealth Advisory Committee on Homelessness, the National SAAP Data and Research Advisory Committee, the Victorian Integrated Data Project committee, the JPET Needs Committee and the national SAAP Information Services Committee.

1.6 *Ms Narelle Clay AM* is the Chief Executive Officer of Southern Youth and Family Services, a community agency, which provides services in the Illawarra and Shoalhaven areas of NSW. Ms Clay has been active in the community sector, and particularly in the area of homelessness, for twenty three years. She is well known leading figure in her field and respected for her activism and commitment to social justice, and as a change agent on program issues and policy. In 2006, she received an Order of Australia Award (AM) for 'distinguished service to the community through social justice advocacy and the provision of accommodation, housing and support for homeless people especially young people'. Ms Clay is a part-time educator with NSW TAFE in various human services courses and an expert trainer in advocacy, community management, policy development and industrial relations. Narelle Clay is active in the union movement, having served as President of the Australian Services Union (NSW and ACT Branches) and Vice President of the Community Services Branch of the Australian Services Union. Narelle has served in many leading roles including as the first Independent Chairperson of the Australian Federation of Homelessness Organisations (AFHO), a previous Chairperson National Youth Coalition of Housing (NYCH) a Member of the Prime Minister's Youth Homelessness Taskforce, the Commonwealth Advisory Committee on Homelessness, the NSW Ministerial Advisory Council on Homelessness, a Member of the Association of Child Welfare Board, and is an active member of the Youth Accommodation Association,

1.7 *Father Wally Dethlefs* is a Roman Catholic priest, who served along with Jan Carter, as Commissioners assisting Commissioner Brian Burdekin with the 1989 HREOC inquiry. In the early 1970s, Father Dethlefs co-founded an emergency shelter for young people in Brisbane. His contributions to young people and the youth sector in Queensland have been foundational – established the Bayside Adolescent Boarding Group, the Youth Advocacy Centre, the Juveniles for Justice Group and the Bail Accommodation Program among others; In recent years Father Dethlefs has had a role in the researching and development of an early intervention response for marginalised students in catholic schools in the Archdiocese of Brisbane. He has had a strong interest in young people and justice system, and is currently a member of the Youth Justice Coalition and the Stakeholders Committee of Juvenile Detention Centres in Queensland, as well as Chaplain to the Brisbane Youth Detention Centre.

## **A framework for the NYC Inquiry**

1.8 In the earlier inquiry, the Declaration of the Rights of the Child provided the basis for investigating whether minimum standard for the protection of the rights of children were being fully upheld in Australia. The position of the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission was clearly stated:

*The Commission established the Inquiry because of its responsibility to protect the rights of children. Homeless children are among the most vulnerable to denial and breach of their rights ... the declaration of Rights of the Child, and more particularly the principles*

*establishing children's rights to:*

- *grow up in the care and the responsibility of their parents where-ever possible;*
- *adequate housing;*
- *enjoy the benefits of social security;*
- *protection from all forms of neglect, cruelty and exploitation; and*
- *special protection, form the basis of the Inquiry.*<sup>1</sup>

During the HREOC Inquiry, on 9 December 1988, the work on the Convention of the Rights of Children was completed, which embedded the rights and protections in a full international treaty.

1.9 The convention went beyond the earlier declaration in the level of detail and it was designed to strengthen the legal obligations that signatory nations have to implement the provisions of the Convention. The Convention was ratified by the Commonwealth of Australia in 1990 and Government is required to report on Australia's conformity to the standard implied by the Convention. An important accountability is provided by the Non-Government Report on the Implementation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (2005).

1.10 Short of legislation that embodies the articles of the Convention in Australian legislation, it is unclear how administrative decisions on children and young people can conform to the requirements of the Convention. However, the Declaration and the Convention provide important and influential points of reference for social policy debate in Australia. One of the enduring benefits of the 1989 Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission report on youth homelessness has been the human rights perspective that homeless children and youth have rights and that it is for government to uphold their rights by removing discrimination and ensuring entitlements. Without an Australian Bill of Rights there is no constitutional means to pursue litigation on behalf of homeless people. There continues to be a vigorous advocacy on advancing the interests of homeless people using human rights criteria in political and moral arguments about homelessness in Australia.

1.11 The National Youth Commission into Youth Homelessness does not have any of the legal powers of the HREOC nor was it bound the mandatory framework on human rights that was and is the HREOC's *raison d'être*. However, in broad terms, the framework of human rights retains its potency as a fundamental frame of reference for social policy and our inquiry does not resile from that standpoint. Otto<sup>2</sup> and others have consistently argued about measures to ameliorate homelessness using human rights arguments as the reference standard and the debate about embodying this international Convention into Australian law will continue. Prior to 2007, the Federal Government had 'shown little interest in developing a domestic human rights regime to implement its human rights obligations under international law'<sup>3</sup> The Victorian Parliament introduced a Charter of Human Rights and responsibilities in July 2006, the first Australian jurisdiction to do so, and it remains to be seen whether other state and territory governments will follow suit or whether the new Federal Government will undertake any initiatives in this area.

1.12 Looking beyond the legal rights and potential litigation as a means of redress for homeless people, most of the issues involve social, economic and political reforms. Tamara Walshe and Carla Klease<sup>4</sup> have raised arguments about using citizenship theory as a vehicle for arguing about the rights and entitlements of homeless people. Noting the adoption of 'social inclusion' as new concept in social policy, they cite three reasons for 'citizenship' as an enrichment of the contemporary advancement of human rights: one is that citizenship nomenclature may be more persuasive for governments that use citizenship as a policy goal. Social citizenship also operationalises various rights in social policy terms at a different level of analysis from human rights although one is derivative of the other. Maintaining bipartisanship at this level may be more viable than on human rights questions where ideological differences start to emerge. Second, the concept of social citizenship promotes the idea of 'community membership' and participation by contrast with the rights of individuals within a legal framework; and third, using Marshall's citizenship theory a range of arguments can be fielded that seek to fortify the civil and political rights of marginalised people by ensuring 'social citizenship' in the form of adequate housing, social security entitlements, an acceptable standard of health and access to education and employment.

1.13 In this context, citizenship is more than political citizenship rights and the obligation to vote in elections; it primarily follows T.H. Marshall in the direction of minimum social standards and entitlements, to achieve status equity and full participation in social life for all members of society. Without safeguarding social citizenship then civil and political rights increasingly become empty of real meaning.

1.14 The NYC supports the findings of the National Children's and Youth Law Centre on strengthening the implementation of the UN Convention in Australia. We also see value in the arguments about 'social citizenship' as a supplementary framework for improving the position of homeless young people.

### **The Inquiry Process.**

1.15 The National Youth Commission into Youth Homelessness was launched on March 7<sup>th</sup> 2007 by the former HREOC Commissioner Brian Burdekin. Professor Burdekin headed the 1989 Inquiry that produced the landmark report *Our Homeless Children*. Between March and August 2007, hearings were held in every state and territory jurisdiction, in all capital cities and some regional centres. In all, 21 days of hearings were conducted in the following locations:

Geelong, Victoria	26 <sup>th</sup> March 2007
Warrnambool, Victoria	27 <sup>th</sup> March 2007
Darwin, Northern Territory	<sup>rd</sup> April 2007
Darwin, Northern Territory	4 <sup>th</sup> April 2007
Brisbane, Queensland	10 <sup>th</sup> April 2007
Brisbane, Queensland	11 <sup>th</sup> April 2007

Townsville, Queensland	12 <sup>th</sup> April 2007
Sydney, New South Wales	16 <sup>th</sup> April 2007
Sydney, New South Wales	17 <sup>th</sup> April 2007
Wagga Wagga, New South Wales	18 <sup>th</sup> April 2007
Canberra, Australian Capital Territory	19 <sup>th</sup> April 2007
Canberra, Australian Capital Territory	20 <sup>th</sup> April 2007
Melbourne, Victoria	23 <sup>rd</sup> April 2007
Melbourne, Victoria	24 <sup>th</sup> April 2007
Adelaide, South Australia	26 <sup>th</sup> April 2007
Adelaide, South Australia	27 <sup>th</sup> April 2007
Hobart, Tasmania	3 <sup>rd</sup> May 2007
Launceston, Tasmania	4 <sup>th</sup> May 2007
Perth, Western Australia	7 <sup>th</sup> June 2007
Perth, Western Australia	8 <sup>th</sup> June 2007
Alice Springs, Northern Territory	25 <sup>th</sup> June 2007

1.16 At these hearings, formal evidence was given by 319 individuals who were stakeholders on the issue of youth homelessness, including homeless young people. The hearings were public and generally a small audience of observers, sometimes from government departments, interested members of the public or workers in the homelessness sector who wanted to listen to the evidence being table on their community. In exceptional cases where a homeless young person was giving evidence of a personal nature about their experiences, this evidence was heard in camera.

1.17 Advertisements were placed in national as well as state and territory and local newspapers inviting individuals and organizations to contribute to the inquiry in person or through written submissions. Altogether, 91 written submissions were received, including seven from Government departments. The Commonwealth Government declined to table a written submission, however, the Minister Nigel Scullion indicated his interest – ‘I have decided to wait to receive the Commission’s final report, rather than make a submission to the inquiry’.

1.18 Apart from formal submissions and presentations at hearings, there were many informal inputs from individuals in the community as well as from government departments.

1.19 After the completion of formal hearings, the Inquiry conducted several policy forums. In Sydney and Melbourne these were facilitated by members of the NYC however there were also forums held in the name of the national Youth Commission. In total, six policy forums were held and a great deal of useful policy advice was provided.

## **The report**

1.20 The report followed the model of the earlier HREOC Inquiry in terms of the rigour of the methodology for evidence gathering and analysis. Chapters 3 to 5 document the basic dimensions of the problem – from the point of view of the young people experiencing homelessness in Chapter 3, the size of the problem using the latest statistical information in Chapter 4 and lastly, in Chapter 5, how policy makers, administrators and researchers have come to frame the problem as a ‘process is discussed.

1.21 Chapters 6 to 11 discuss the causes of youth homelessness, which include both structural factors such as poverty and labour market disadvantage as well as individual characteristics, such as whether an individual suffers mental illness or not. The crisis in care and protection, discussed in Chapter 9, was found to be a major contributor to many young people becoming homeless and it is from this group that a majority of the chronically homeless young people with high and complex needs come.

1.22 In Chapters 12 to 20, a range of government-funded responses are discussed in detail with recommendations

1.23 Lastly in Chapters 21, 22 and 23, a broader system-wide perspective is adopted to consider the macro-level reforms that will be necessary to effect long-term change.

## **Scope of the Inquiry**

1.24 Several definitions provide the boundary for the scope of this inquiry and its recommendations.

## **Young people**

1.25 For the purpose of this inquiry, the focus is on young people from 12 to 24 years of age. Within this age range, which covers ‘young people’ for the purpose of youth policy, are young teenagers who are usually still dependent, older teenagers over the age of 18 years, and young adults over the legal age of 18. The transition from childhood through adolescence to adulthood appears to be a somewhat more drawn out transition. The report comments on children and homelessness where this is appropriate.

## **Homelessness**

1.26 A major shift in homelessness since the 1970s has been the appearance of a more diverse range of social groups in the homeless population including young people, and families with children. In Australia, homelessness has been widely accepted as more than ‘rooflessness’ since for much of the time homeless people have a transient existence moving between various forms of temporary shelter. Young people become homeless because their family support breaks down leading to a detachment from

family and transience. The breakdown of family relations may be the result of violent abuse including sexual abuse, neglect and lack of adequate love and care or superheated adolescent conflict between parents and teenagers. For young people who go into care and protection, support from their family of origin has effectively broken down long before they experience homelessness.

1.27 The most widely accepted definition of homelessness is the definition used by the Australian Bureau of Statistics. This definition is based on the idea that there are shared community cultural standards about the minimum accommodation acceptable in contemporary Australia<sup>5</sup>. The approximate minimum for a single person (or couple) is a small rental flat with a bedroom, living room, kitchen and bathroom and some security of tenure provided by a lease. The ABS definition<sup>6</sup> identifies 'primary', 'secondary' and 'tertiary' categories of homelessness:

- Primary homelessness includes people without conventional accommodation, such as people living on the streets or using cars or railway carriages for temporary shelter.
- Secondary homelessness includes people who move frequently from one form of temporary shelter to another including boarding houses, emergency accommodation and short-term stays with other households.
- Tertiary homelessness refers to people staying in boarding houses on a medium to long-term basis, defined as 13 weeks or longer. They are homeless because their accommodation does not have the characteristics identified in the minimum community standard.

The ABS definition does not include families or individuals living in caravans where no-one in the household is working. Nor does it include situations where two or even three families share a house in over-crowded conditions on a semi-permanent basis. Not homeless by this definition are people limited security of tenure who remain highly vulnerable and at-risk of homelessness<sup>7</sup>. Also, vulnerable individuals and families may move in and out of homelessness as subsequent crises affect their lives. This has been called 'episodic'<sup>8</sup> or 'iterative'<sup>9</sup> homelessness.

1.28 Children in institutional care or in juvenile justice settings are not included as 'homeless' in terms of the formal definition in use, although they are particularly vulnerable groups, which experience higher rates of homelessness upon leaving these secure arrangements. They are at-risk but not actually homeless while in secure accommodation. While the adequacy of care and protection programs and services was raised in evidence to the Inquiry, a full examination of these issues would require an inquiry dedicated solely to this matter.

1.29 There is a large population of individuals, couples and families with children and young people who live in caravans and mobile homes. Caravan dwellers are certainly 'marginally housed' and the ABS report, *Counting The Homeless 2001*, reported 23,000 households living in caravan parks throughout Australia where no member of the household was employed.

## ENDNOTES

- 1 HREOC (1989) *Our Homeless Children*, Chapter 4 *The Rights of the Child*, p.33.
- 2 National Children's and Youth Law Centre & Defence for Children International (2005) *The Non-Government Report on the implementation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child in Australia*.
- 3 Otto, D. & Lynch, P. (2003) 'Housing, Homelessness and Human Rights' *Australian Journal of Human Rights*, Vol. 10, No 2.
- 4 National Children's and Youth Law Centre & Defence for Children International (2005) *The Non-Government Report on the implementation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child in Australia*.
- 5 Walshe, T. and Klease, C. (2004) 'Down and Out? Homelessness and citizenship', *Australian Journal of Human Rights*, Vol. 10, No. 2.
- 6 Chamberlain C & MacKenzie D 1992. 'Understanding contemporary homelessness: issues of definition and meaning', *Australian Journal of Social Issues* 27(4):274-297.
- 7 AIHW, (2007) *Australia's Welfare* (Chapter 6: The dynamics of homelessness), Canberra: Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, p.275.
- 8 MacKenzie, D. and Chamberlain, C. (2003) *Homeless Careers: Pathways in and out of homelessness*, Melbourne: Swinburne and RMIT Universities.
- 9 Robinson C 2002. *Living on the outside: homelessness in the South Sydney LGA*. Sydney: South Sydney City Council; and Robinson C 2003. *Understanding iterative homelessness: the case of people with mental disorders: a final report*. Sydney: AHURI.





# 2

The HREOC report in 1989, led to increased supported accommodation for young people and the IHSY health initiative (approx \$4.4 million annually) as well as employment and training support in the form of JPET (\$19.9 million annually in 2005-6). However since the mid-nineties, there has been a stagnation of funding in real terms for areas such as supported accommodation (ie. SAAP) and over a long period of time, for public and community housing. The major new national initiative has been at the front end of early intervention with the Commonwealth Reconnect program (\$20 million annually). A second early intervention initiative by the Commonwealth was the small Family Homelessness Prevention Pilot Program. It commenced in 2001 and continued under a different name but with no increase beyond the eight agencies until 2008 (\$2.6 million annually). There have been several significant youth homelessness and early intervention initiatives by various states such as Victoria with the School Focused Youth Service, the Family Reconciliation and Mediation Program and YEETI. In Queensland there is the Youth Support Coordinators initiative (\$8 million annually).



## Chapter 2 | Government responses since Burdekin

### Background

2.1 During the post-war period and up to the mid-seventies assistance to homeless people was primarily delivered by charitable and church groups. Even during the 1950s and 1960s when there was full-employment, there were groups of people, who were homeless. People with serious mental illnesses would be committed to mental institutions while other people with borderline conditions would be found in the homeless population. Homeless people, including some younger people, tended to suffer alcohol related issues.

2.2 In 1974, the Homeless Persons' Assistance Act passed by the Commonwealth Government provided government funds for some centres in the capital cities that provided accommodation and assistance for homeless people.

2.3 In 1979 and 1980 several reports appeared that pointed out that agencies were increasingly encountering young people amongst the homeless. A Senate Standing Committee on Youth Homelessness in 1982 opened the way for a consolidated program known as the Supported Accommodation and Assistance Program or SAAP in 1985. Youth SAAP services are a part of the overall program.

2.4 The purpose of this brief review of government responses to youth homelessness is to map the policy landscape broadly, to acknowledge the major initiatives but not list every pilot project that has ever been launched. All states and territories participate in SAAP, which commenced prior to Burdekin, although there was an expansion of supported accommodation for young people in the early nineties. All states and territories have youth policies and implement these policies in various ways. It can be argued that homeless youth people will benefit to some extent, although to what extent is not known.

## Commonwealth Government

2.5 Following the Burdekin report of 1989, and amid a great deal of publicity and public interest, the Federal government announced \$100m over four years for a Youth Social Justice Package for Young Australians.

*More than half of the expenditure will directly assist homeless young people through a doubling of accommodation capacity, substantial improvements in the Youth Homeless Allowance (YHA) and better health services ... they represent a significant response to the issues raised by the recent Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission report ... (quoted in National Clearinghouse for Youth Studies, 1989, p.41)<sup>1</sup>*

As part of this funding, the Innovative Health Services for Homeless Youth (IHSY) was established as a joint Commonwealth and state and territory government program response to the Burdekin Report. It promoted a diverse range of youth health projects in 1991 with the aim 'to improve the health outcomes of homeless and otherwise at-risk youth aged 12-24 years and their dependents through the provision of specialised health services and improved access to mainstream health services'<sup>2</sup>. The program has continued to the present day.

2.6 In 1992, the Job Placement, Employment and Training Program (JPET) was established as a pilot program as part of the National Employment and Training program, designed to assist and support 15-19 year olds at risk of long term homelessness, unemployment and poverty. In 1995, JPET was discontinued but then it was announced in the 1996-97 Federal budget that the program would be re-established and it recommenced operations in January 1997. Since 2006, JPET has been managed by the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations (DEWR), but it has been reformed administratively to be more in line with DEWR's employment-focused outcomes.

2.7 The change of government saw the termination of the Students At Risk (STAR) program that had been a component of the Social Justice Strategy. However, a Prime Minister's Youth Homeless Taskforce chaired by Major David Eldridge initiated a pilot scheme of 26 projects to investigate the best way to prevent homelessness for young people. The report of the taskforce, Putting Families in the Picture, followed an evaluation of the pilot program. A recurrently funded early intervention program Reconnect was launched in 1998 'to improve the level of engagement of homeless young people or those at risk of homelessness with their families, work, education, training and the community'<sup>3</sup>. The initial budget allocation was \$60 million over four years.

## New South Wales<sup>4</sup>

2.8 In New South Wales, SAAP comprises the main state response to homelessness. The NSW Partnership against Homelessness (PAH) set up in 1999 brought together twelve departments to contribute to a cross-departmental work plan that was directed to improving state-wide and cross agency coordination of responses to homelessness. At the time this report was published, a fully-worked out state plan of action had not been completed, but some work has begun to this end. However, an Inner City Homelessness Action Plan Phase 2 – 2007-2011 was launched in August 2007, which focused on rough sleepers in the inner city, inter-agency collaboration between agencies in the inner

city, continued priorities from Phase 1 and a long-term vision to 'end homelessness in inner city Sydney.

2.9 New South Wales has developed the NSW Housing and Human Services Accord, in collaboration with other government and non-government agencies, to meet the government's commitment to assist people with complex housing needs. The Accord is a framework for cross-agency housing and support agreements to assist social housing applicants and existing tenants with high and complex needs to obtain the support they require to sustain their tenancies. Some new service models are being trialled under the Accord, eg. the Department of Housing has entered into an agreement with the Department of Community Services (DOCS) to provide housing and support, using public housing properties for up to 12 young people leaving out-of-home care in the Newcastle/Maitland area. A worker from DOCS assesses the level of client support needs and then ensures support is delivered to these young people for an agreed period. Another example, is a project that assists young people with an intellectual disability to leave out-of-home care. Similarly a third pilot provides stable housing and support for young people moving out of the juvenile justice system to independent living.

2.10 The PAH recognises young people as a group at-risk of homelessness. A notable single project was the Miller Live 'N' Learn program a foyer-type accommodation setting for young people which was originally an idea proposed by the Youth Accommodation Coalition. The project attracted union and foundation support, and the Department of Housing provided much of the funding and acted as lead agency. The campus was established in 20025. Some supplementary initiatives directed specifically to young people are the NSW Housing Youth Scholarships, which provided funds of \$2000 for 100 disadvantaged young people in social housing to continue in school until Year 12.

## **Victoria<sup>6</sup>**

2.11 A major Victorian initiative has been the Victorian Homelessness Strategy (VHS), which has sought to provide a whole of government framework for addressing homelessness in Victorian in 2000.

2.12 A focus on new models of services for young people was developed through the Youth Homelessness Action Plan Stages 1 and 2. Along similar lines to the underpinning goal of Reconnect, a Family Reconciliation and Mediation Program was launched for homeless young people who have been homeless for some time. The central provider Melbourne City Mission provides brokerage funds to SAAP or THM services to provide brief counselling and other appropriate family interventions. A second initiative known as the Youth Education, Employment and Training initiative provides brokerage funding that can be accessed through SAAP or Transitional Housing Management (THM) services to support homeless young people to access education, employment and training services and opportunities in some ways similar to JPET-type support. Stage 2 of the Youth Homelessness Action Plan has received \$7.5m over four years in addition to capital funds of \$6.3m.

2.13 The YHAP Stage 2, 'Creating Connections' was launched in 2006 underpinned by \$28.7 million over four years from 2006-2010 and defined its strategic approach in terms of four key directions – early intervention and interdependence, individualised accommodation and housing support options, greater access to complementary services

and enhancement of the homelessness service system - and 10 actions whereby the main objectives will be implemented. These actions were: the creation of youth hubs with accommodation linked to regional hubs; assistance for young people entering the private rental market; intensive case management for young people with high and complex needs; youth-focused placement; 24 hour response for youth refugees; continuing the initiatives under YHAP 1; the introduction of new models of practice; and the development of service system capacity through better coordination, workforce development and the assessment and accreditation of homelessness services.

2.14 The School Focused Youth Service (SFYS) has been on the ground since 1997 following the Youth Suicide Prevention Taskforce. The model was developed for youth at risk of homelessness but the role of the SFYS is the coordination of prevention and early intervention strategies for at-risk youth aged 10 to 18 years of age by facilitating cooperative work by schools and community agencies. Supplementary brokerage funds have been added to this effort from the Office for Children.

2.15 The establishment of an Office for Child Safety headed by Commissioner Bernie Geary has strengthened the oversight of child-care and protection in Victoria.

## Queensland<sup>7</sup>

2.16 Queensland has developed a Responding to Homeless strategy, which received \$235.52m over four years, including SAAP. Specifically for homeless young people was \$4.55 million for the Addressing Volatile Substances Misuse initiative. The additional funds have underwritten a number of initiatives such as a 24 hour free information and referral service, integrated Homelessness Health Response teams in Brisbane, the Gold Coast, Townsville and Cairns, a Homeless persons Court Diversion Program beginning in 2006 to direct homeless people brought before courts for minor offences to the appropriate support services.

2.17 The Inquiry received a submission from the Queensland Department of education, Training and the Arts. The Queensland Government's Education and training reforms for the Future commenced in 2002 represented some major changes in education with some measures directed specifically to at-risk and homeless young people. The option of flexible arrangements for schooling is particularly useful for at-risk or homeless students. Under the Flexible Learning Services (FLS) program, funding of \$2.0 million per year provides for the purchase of effective curriculum, delivery strategies and human resources to support disengaged 15–17 year old young people's individual learning pathways. District Youth Achievement Plans (DYAP) are a local plan of action to assist young people, especially those aged 15–17 years, to reach their education and career goals. The main aim of a DYAP is the coordination of programs and services for young people at the local level, for both state and non-state schools, and including vocational education and training providers and other services.

2.18 Another relevant program is the Access to Pathways grants program (\$5.9 million per year) supports community initiatives by providing funding to improve participation, retention and attainment for 15–17 year olds at risk of disengaging from learning. These funds provide direct support to young people via the delivery of additional education programs to 'at risk' 15–17 year old youth and also support locally defined activities local priorities, as determined in District Youth Achievement Plans.

2.19 A notable innovation is the Youth Support Coordinators initiative that deploys 113 workers throughout the state to provide for prevention and early intervention for at risk youth to avoid homelessness and premature school leaving. The program commenced in the late nineties and was expanded from a network of 34 coordinators to 100 following the positive 1999 evaluation. The YSC program will receive funding of \$32m over four years from 2005 to 2010.

2.20 There are 100 community education counsellors who work closely with their local communities and the school guidance officers to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. The Get Set for Work initiative provides employment and training assistance through local organisations to help young people aged 15–17 years to prepare for employment.

2.21 Lastly, the Home School Linkage Project provides specialised advice on the development and implementation of resources to achieve better understanding and awareness between schools and local Indigenous communities.

## **South Australia<sup>8</sup>**

2.22 South Australia's creation of a Social Inclusion Unit attached to the Department of Premier and Cabinet was modelled on the Blair Government's Social Exclusion Unit approach. Homelessness including youth homelessness was raised as a high priority and \$23m committed over five years for initiatives to reduce the number of people experiencing homelessness. Three initiatives funded were:

2.23 Support for Homeless Students - a service network to support homeless students, which included phone support and advice for students and counsellors at DECS and TAFE, and support packages for students and families in a case management context.

2.24 Supported Tenancies Program (STP) - a program designed to assist vulnerable individuals and families at risk of eviction in the public housing sector to access support services for maintaining a tenancy and to prevent homelessness.

2.25 Private Rental Liaison Program (PRLP) - where specific workers located within Housing SA are employed to link people on low incomes with landlords and real estate agents with rental vacancies. 2006-2007 figures show that 96 out of 323 people assisted, or 30 per cent of those housed in the private rental market, were under the age of 25. The Private Rental Liaison Officer also has the capacity to support individuals in private rental tenancies for 6 months after allocation.

2.26 The South Australia Government's Thinker's in Residence program in 2006 brought Ms Roseanne Haggerty from Common Ground in New York to Adelaide with a view to developing a systemic response to homelessness in South Australia. Several developments in the City of Adelaide have been informed by models derived from Ms Haggerty's work in New York.

## **Western Australia<sup>9</sup>**

2.27 The Western Australian Government established the State Homelessness Taskforce in July 2001 to develop a State Homelessness Strategy. The Taskforce report

was followed in May 2002 with \$32 million funding for various initiatives envisaged under the strategy. A Homeless Helpline was established, three new crisis accommodation services, two specifically for youth – one in Freemantle and other in Broome. Five youth accommodation services were funded to teach parenting skills to homeless young parents and to support them. A total of \$400,000 was spent on counselling for children in families who experience homelessness. Seventeen rural and remote women's refuges were funded to employ a child support worker. Three new services were funded to undertake leaving care support. The Street Doctor program has been continued and expanded. The WA component of Innovative Health Services for Homeless Youth has been particularly active, developing several new models that have been highly successful.

2.28 New funding was invested in accommodation for the homeless. In May 2006, the Western Australian Government provided some additional funds for SAAP – an additional \$1.25 million per year and in 2005-06 the Government applied a more generous indexation to the state component of SAAP at a cost of \$1.5 million, the first real increase in funding since 1998-99. The WA submission observed: 'adequate funding is critical to the ongoing capacity of YSAAP services to continue to respond to the needs of homeless young people however, the Australian Government has not provided any additional funding for viability issues of SAAP services'<sup>10</sup>.

2.29 The Department of Community Development has provided \$3.5 million over four years to assist young people in private rental to avoid homelessness and maintain their tenancies. This initiative is in line with some similar recommendations in this report. Some \$115,000 per year has been provided to the Youth Legal Service and Mission Australia to provide financial counselling services for young people.

2.30 The gap between the supply and demand for housing in Western Australia is acute. The Government has committed \$104 million towards social housing over and above the State Government's obligations under the Commonwealth-State Housing Agreement to create 1000 new dwellings. One of the initiatives that the Department of Housing under the homelessness strategy has been the building of appropriate one and two bedroom units to cater for the needs of singles including youth. Measures have also been taken to increase bond assistance in line with market increases. In 2005-06, several new short-term youth accommodation units were built in Geraldton, East Victoria Park, Bunbury, Balcatta, Kelmscott and Basseldean.

2.31 In 2003, an evaluation of the Government's initiatives under the Homelessness Strategy had been 'satisfactory' and 'timely' but also sounded a warning that 'the major concern of stakeholders is that Government will be seen to have done something with these initiatives and the focus will be removed from the area. With so much left to do it is hoped that this is just the start of an on-going commitment by Government, to solving the problem'<sup>11</sup>. The WA Homelessness Strategy as such concluded in 2006.

## **Tasmania<sup>12</sup>**

2.32 Tasmania is a small jurisdiction heavily reliant on its funding for SAAP and housing under the Commonwealth-States Housing Agreement. A notable Tasmania initiative undertaken in 2003 was the commissioning of a discussion paper 'Homelessness and a Whole of Government Approach', from the University of Tasmania<sup>13</sup>. The paper raised a series of characteristics of a 'whole of government approach' including:



cooperative relationships such as across government and community organisations, a higher profile for homelessness as an issue in the community, minimised duplication and attention to service gaps, consistent data collection strategies, consultation with stakeholders, planned approach to supporting homeless people with complex needs, and minimising the social, economic and individual costs of homelessness. A subsequent document outlined the framework for the provision of homelessness services in Tasmania<sup>14</sup>.

2.33 A range of initiatives in the child-care and protection area as preventative measures such as Leaving Care programs, the Relative Care Assistance Program, Child Health and Parenting Services, and Preventative Case Management Services. The 'Report on Child Protection Services in Tasmania 2006' has recommended a number of legislative amendments to the Children, Young Persons and Their Families Act and these were being followed up at the time of this report. One amendment details the responsibility of the Department of Health and Human Services to assist young adults who have been in out of home care until the age of 21.

2.34 Since the mid-nineties, Tasmania has been active on the early intervention front. The social workers in senior colleges have been a particularly active network supporting students at-risk and those who become homeless. Some colleges such as Hobart College employ a youth worker as well. There are Youth Learning Officers who work with at-risk students to assist their transition to employment or further education and training. Alternative education programs exist in Launceston, Hobart and the North-West for 13-18 year old students 'not suited' to mainstream schooling.

## **Northern Territory<sup>15</sup>**

2.35 The Northern Territory is a small jurisdiction heavily dependent on Commonwealth funding for programs and initiatives. Apart from SAAP, there have been a number of other initiatives to improve the safety of Indigenous women and young people on the streets and in transit between communities and the town centres.

2.36 One such service is Youth Beat in Darwin and Palmerston, which is funded by the Department of Health and Community Services. This initiative provides outreach support to young people on the streets at night, with aims to:

- Improve the safety of young people at night, including diverting them from risky behaviour and crime
- Engage, rather than marginalise young people
- Link young people to family, community education and recreation through mentoring and referral
- Support families to care for, and take responsibility for their children

2.37 In Darwin, the Darwin Transport and Return to Home Services funded by the Department of Justice provide a diverse range of services for the Larrakia Community. In Alice Springs, the Youth Drop-in Centre and Support Services opens from 9pm to 1am to help young people find safe overnight shelter and provides case work support. This service works in conjunction with the Youth Night Patrol operated by Tangentyre Council.

2.38 The Safe Families Program in Alice Springs, jointly funded by the NT Government DHCS and FaHCSIA under the Indigenous Family Violence Partnerships Agreement has three components:

- Two independent living houses for families or young people in crisis;
- Accommodation for 7-14 year old Indigenous young people who have experienced family breakdown;
- Family workers connecting young people back to their families and communities.

In some respects this initiative incorporates elements of the Reconnect model, but with a strong emphasis on working with extended Indigenous families.

2.39 There has been a concern about the lower school achievement of Indigenous young people and there are education projects for at-risk Indigenous young people such as the Wilowra Youth Program and the The Irrkerlantye Learning Centre, an Alice Springs based Eastern/Central Arrernte Education and Community Development Program that grew out of an alternative secondary school for at-risk Indigenous children from the Alice Springs Town Camps.

2.40 Family violence and its consequences is a major concern directly contributing to homelessness. The Peace at Home Project is a joint NT and Commonwealth Government project that started in Katherine in 2006 to address the complex of issues associated with domestic and family violence. Cross-agency and cross-department Integrated Service Response Teams provide case management for families experiencing high levels of family violence and child abuse. The project is based in Katherine Region but also services outlying communities.

2.41 The recent involvement of the Commonwealth on Indigenous care and protection issues in NT Indigenous communities has attracted public criticism on a number of grounds, but it did represent a major Federal commitment to Indigenous communities, with significant funds for services, community building and housing to be forthcoming. The new Federal Government has begun to make certain changes, but it has reiterated a Commonwealth commitment to undertake a major long-term effort to redress the endemic issues of Indigenous communities in the Northern Territory. Depending on what happens, potentially, these measures will have a significant impact on Indigenous youth homelessness in the Territory.

## **Australian Capital Territory**

2.42 The Australian Capital Territory government did not provide a submission to the Inquiry. However, the issue of homelessness has been prominent in this small jurisdiction. In June 2002, the ACT Government commissioned ACTCOSS to undertake a comprehensive needs analysis of homelessness in the ACT<sup>16</sup>. The main consequential response by Government was the development of an ACT Homelessness Strategy. As a part of the process of developing the ACT homelessness strategy, a Review of YSAAP was undertaken beginning late in 2003<sup>17</sup>, followed by a consultation by the ACT Youth Coalition.

2.43 Breaking the Cycle: the ACT Homelessness Strategy<sup>18</sup> was published in November 2003. Under this broader framework, a Youth Homelessness Action Plan was

developed by the Youth Homelessness Working Group and the Youth Policy Forum, for implementation in 2007. Sector development comprised a major emphasis: new protocol between SAAP services and Child Protection, training on the protocol, a quarterly youth homelessness forum, early intervention and prevention fact sheets, development and implementation of a brokerage support model for 'couch-surfing', working with youth training. Five Housing ACT properties were trialled for share household arrangements for young people. Some attention has been accorded to working with parents and families in the form of the Raja Service and the Canberra Fathers and Children's Service in addition to earlier initiatives.

2.44 The first progress report presented to the ACT Government in November 2005 acknowledged that 'the majority of actions in the Strategy seek to implement and achieve reform of the service system'<sup>19</sup>. In the second progress report<sup>20</sup>, 41 of the original 82 actions were recorded as completed leaving 26 consolidated actions for attention in the final year of the strategy.

## Summary

2.45 Broadly across the twenty years since the Burdekin Report the picture is one of considerable innovation but funding stagnation and no-growth particularly in supported accommodation (ie.SAAP) and public and community housing. There was an expansion of youth SAAP capacity following the HREOC report. The major new initiatives have been at the front end of early intervention with the Commonwealth Reconnect program (\$20 million per year). A second early intervention initiative by the Commonwealth was the Family Homelessness Prevention Pilot Program, which commenced in 2001 with \$5 million of funding over three years for eight services one in each jurisdiction. Despite a positive evaluation in 2002-03, the program involving the same eight agencies, was renamed the HOME Advice program and supported for a further four years. This early intervention initiative is not a youth program as such but assisted 3,438 children. Given that some 55,000 children pass through SAAP services each year, it represents an important but small response for children.

2.46 Public and community housing funding has remain relatively static since the Burdekin Report and the additional supported accommodation for young people that also followed the report was the last major injection of growth funds into SAAP, which thereafter, increased but at a rate less than the rise in real costs. The Government submissions and other documents record a good deal of creative activity, innovation and pilot projects, but only a modest capacity to substantially add to range of services for homeless young people beyond what is possible with the funds under the SAAP agreement.

2.47 The most notable initiatives have been the development of strategic approaches to homelessness in Victoria, Western Australia and Queensland and the ACT, and the priority given to homelessness by the South Australian Social Inclusion Unit. These efforts have represented an attempt to make strategies more explicit and to do forward planning. New money has been invested by state governments to enhance their homelessness service systems. Some funds have increased the capacity of the system to provide additional accommodation, but state and territory funds have been limited. As a foundation program, SAAP, has not been funded in line with increasing real costs for

more than a decade. Likewise, Funding for public and community housing has been constrained over a long period. Several state submissions made these same points.

2.48 The state and territory initiatives to develop more systematic and broad-based strategies for responding to homelessness have been engines for innovation and some additional new funds. The policy documents have generally reflected ambitions to construct 'whole of government' responses, but collaborations with the Commonwealth Government have been somewhat restricted over the past decade and significant resources that might be possible under a full national approach have not been available. Also, when reading some of the policy documents, phrases such as 'the final period of the strategy'<sup>21</sup> suggest that the strategies are time-limited and not long-term, even though the new initiatives created will continue recurrently.

## ENDNOTES

- 1 Fopp, R. (1989) 'Press Coverage of the Burdekin Report' Youth Studies Australia, 8(4), p.10-12.
- 2 Program objectives for the Innovative Health Services for Homeless Youth, [www.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/health-pubhlth-strateg-youth-ihshy.htm](http://www.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/health-pubhlth-strateg-youth-ihshy.htm)
- 3 Evaluation Committee, Prime Ministerial Youth Homeless Taskforce (1998) Putting Families in the Picture: Supplementary Report, Canberra: Department of Family and Community Services.
- 4 Submission 91, A submission from the New South Wales Department of Housing.
- 5 Randolph, W. and Wood, H. (2005) A interim evaluation of the Miller Live 'N' Learn Campus, Melbourne: AHURI, UNSW/UWS Research Centre.
- 6 Submission 39, A submission from the Office of Housing, Department of Human Services, written in consultation with the Office for Children (DHS).
- 7 Submission 77, A submission from the Department of Education, Training and the Arts.
- 8 The Inquiry received submissions from the South Australian Department for Families and Communities (Submission 17, Part 1), the Office for Youth (a division of the Department of Further Education, Employment, Science and Technology) (Submission 17 Part 2), and the Ministers Youth Council (Office for Youth) (Submission 57).
- 9 Submission 56, A submission from the Department of Housing and Works, the Department for Child Protection; Submission 82, A submission from the Department for Child Protection, and Submission 48 from the Department of health, Child and Adolescent Health Service.
- 10 Submission 82, Department of Child Protection, p.2.
- 11 Estill & Associates (2006) Evaluation of the Impact and Effectiveness of the Western Australian State Homelessness Strategy, Perth: Department of Community Development, p.81.
- 12 Submission 69, A submission from the Tasmanian Government.
- 13 Jones, GW, Natalier, KA, (2003) Homelessness and a Whole of Government Approach: A Discussion Paper, Hobart: Department of Health and Human Services.
- 14 Child Youth and Family Support Branch(2006) Integrated Continuum of Support Model for homeless people and those at risk of homelessness, Hobart: Department of Health and Human Services.
- 15 Submission 80, A submission from the Northern Territory Government, combined department submission prepared by the Family and Children's Services Branch of the Department of Health and community Services.
- 16 ACTCOSS (2002) Needs Analysis of Homelessness in the ACT: Final report, Canberra: Department of Disability, Housing and community Services.
- 17 MacKenzie, D. and Young, K. (2005) Review of Youth SAAP in the ACT, Canberra: DDHCS.
- 18 KPMG Assurance and Advisory (2003) Breaking the Cycle: the ACT Homelessness Strategy, Canberra Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services.
- 19 Hargreaves, J. (Minister for Disability, Housing and Community Services, First Progress report on the implementation of Breaking the Cycle: the ACT Homelessness Strategy for the period July 2004-June 2005, November 2005.
- 20 Gallagher, K. (Minister of Disability and Community Services), Second Progress report on the implementation of Breaking the Cycle: the ACT Homelessness Strategy for the period July 2005-June 2006, 2007, p.4.

# 3

Young people become homeless because of family breakdown, often stemming from parental conflicts or a collapse of their relationship with a husband/wife or partner. Some young people who are living independently become homeless because they can't afford living expenses including rent. Being homeless is unsafe, unhealthy and very stressful. Young people experiencing homelessness are not a homogenous group. They come from a range of family backgrounds, have diverse dispositions, expectations and desires, and they encounter services of varying quality. Their common needs are to have a stable home; friends; healthy nutrition; to be cared about as individuals; to have adequate educational support; help when they need help; and reliable adults in their lives. The frustration, distress and anger expressed by many of the young people who submitted evidence indicates that Australia still struggles to meet their needs.



## Chapter 3 | Experiences of Youth Homelessness

*Staying at school was hard.*

*Finding work is hard.*

*Keeping a job is hard.*

*Eating well (if at all) was hard.*

*Being social is hard.*

*I felt helpless and alone.*

*It's hard to feel like a normal person.<sup>1</sup>*

### Introduction

3.1 At the outset of the National Youth Commission Inquiry into Youth Homeless, the Commissioners encouraged young people to come forward and provide direct evidence about the experience of being homeless. Young people appeared before the Commissioners at the majority of public hearings and were notable for their generosity in sharing their stories. Additionally, a significant number of young people responded to the National Youth Commission's Youth Survey, once again demonstrating great generosity in offering important personal information about what it is like to be homeless in Australia in 2007.<sup>2</sup>

3.2 The Inquiry also sought evidence about the experience of youth homelessness from organisations and researchers. These witnesses provided information that supplemented and expanded on the material provided by young people.

3.3 The picture that emerged from the evidence submitted to the Inquiry is one of diversity and universality. Young people experiencing homelessness are not a homogenous group. They come from a range of family backgrounds, they have a range of dispositions, they have differing expectations and desires, and they encounter services of differing quality. What unifies young people are their needs as adolescents and as human beings, some of which include having a home; friends; proper nourishment; being cared about as individuals; having adequate support to complete an education; help when they need help; and adults in their lives who can be relied upon. The frustration, distress and

anger expressed by many of the young people who submitted evidence is indicative that Australia still struggles to meet these needs.

## Experiencing Homelessness

3.4 Through its Youth Survey, the Inquiry invited young people to reflect on some of the hardest aspects of being homelessness. Young people responded by outlining the reality of daily life: being cold<sup>3</sup>, being hungry and uncertain about where your next meal will come from<sup>4</sup>, having to move all the time and not knowing where you will sleep<sup>5</sup>, being unable to shower<sup>6</sup>, being short of clothing<sup>7</sup>, being unable to keep or protect personal possessions<sup>8</sup>, getting sexually assaulted, hurt or threatened<sup>9</sup>, and being 'moved on' in public spaces.<sup>10</sup> One young woman who became homeless at 13 wrote:

*Being so young with no home, I had no money, no bed, no clothes, wasn't able to bathe or eat and drink.*<sup>11</sup>

Another young woman who became homeless at 17 wrote about:

*... being left out in the cold and not having any warm clothes/shoes to wear.*<sup>12</sup>

A young man advised the Inquiry about what he found most difficult:

*... not knowing where to go to sleep. Not having privacy. Cannot have any belongings that are valued because you don't know where you will put [them].*<sup>13</sup>

3.5 The evidence of services and researchers provided a context for the material submitted by young people. At the hearing in Hobart and through its submission, Alted, which is an alternative education provider, pointed out that young homeless people don't have cooking facilities and eating is therefore more expensive for them than it is for people who are housed.<sup>14</sup> The service also mentioned the closure of some of the free food services operating in its region. YouthLaw (Vic) advised the Inquiry that young people on low, or no, incomes do not have adequate funds to pay for transport when travelling to gain important help, such as antenatal care, food, accommodation, and emotional support.<sup>15</sup> Service to Youth Council (SA) explained that young homeless people are at a disadvantage in terms of their lack of life skills and that they also experience discrimination when seeking housing.<sup>16</sup> A number of services submitted evidence suggesting that young people from refugee backgrounds often have additional vulnerabilities.<sup>17</sup> Services also highlighted the vulnerabilities of young pregnant women and young families.<sup>18</sup> A witness from Crossroads West, a Western Australian service with a vast geographical catchment spoke about young families living in shocking circumstances:

*We had an example of a young woman who is currently in regional Kalgoorlie who is living in a shed with two children because she has no place to go.*<sup>19</sup>

Zig Zag Young Women's Resource Centre (Qld) told the Inquiry that young homeless women with children tend to sleep in unsafe situations, such as on couches in the houses of people they don't really know, rather than go into shelters or live on the streets.<sup>20</sup>

3.6 In their direct evidence about the experience of being homeless, young people also touched on the emotional toll of homelessness. They described feeling frustrated<sup>21</sup>, embarrassed<sup>22</sup>, helpless and vulnerable<sup>23</sup>, hopeless<sup>24</sup>, unhappy<sup>25</sup>, worthless<sup>26</sup>, scared and



fearful<sup>27</sup>, anxious<sup>28</sup>, isolated and lonely<sup>29</sup>, angry<sup>30</sup>, and envious of other young people with homes and families<sup>31</sup>. One young woman described her emotions this way:

*The feeling of hopelessness, like you're not worth anything, you feel like giving up, like it's not worth it.*<sup>32</sup>

A young man wrote to the Inquiry about what he found most difficult:

*The embarrassment from being homeless. You get dirty looks and people never seem to understand.*<sup>33</sup>

3.7 A worker who was homeless as a youth pointed out that these emotional experiences are not always transitory:

*By the time I was 19, I had witnessed or personally experienced every negative behaviour or act a human being can inflict upon another. One of my most vivid memories was during one of my stays in a refuge, when a young woman showed me the scars under her breast from where her boyfriend would butt out his cigarettes. She was only a couple of years older than me at the time.*<sup>34</sup>

She pointed out that such experiences change young people and compound their problems.

3.8 Many of the young people who appeared at the public hearings came with trusted services and with friends, partners and young children, underscoring the evidence the Inquiry received about the centrality of relationships in young people's lives. For young people who do not have positive ongoing connections with family, relationships with workers take on increased significance. A young person in Melbourne pointed out that good workers in good services can fill some of the emotional gaps:

*... there were a couple of places in Sydney, that had a real thing going where the workers became like a surrogate parent, and every time that you had a bit of a step back you could go back to the refuge, just like going back home if you had a normal sort of family.*<sup>35</sup>

In Brisbane, another young person voiced similar sentiments:

I could have left youth shelters and that and lived independently, but I found the problem was that you become so emotionally attached to those places. Because you know, even though the professional people aren't meant to be like emotionally involved and that sort of stuff, they are ...<sup>36</sup>

3.9 In Perth, a young person told the Inquiry about how important it was to be respected and cared for by workers, to be given family-style support, where workers are available to you at any time of the day or night.<sup>37</sup> In Sydney, a young person talked about his continuing connection to two workers who helped him find a path out of homelessness:

*These two ladies know me like the back of my hands. Sometimes probably better than I know myself.*<sup>38</sup>

3.10 Many young people who submitted evidence to the Inquiry identified the presence of 'good' services as a positive influence in their lives.<sup>39</sup> Many also identified

friendship as a sustaining factor.<sup>40</sup> One young woman talked about friendship making a real difference when she was on the street:

*... I was lucky to be surrounded by good people. You look after them, they look after you*<sup>41</sup>.

A young person in Brisbane talked about the importance of friendships with young people who were a year or two older:

*It helped because they understood what I had been through ...*<sup>42</sup>

3.11 Another young person in Brisbane acknowledged the community spirit and the freedom that he'd experienced on the street, but told the Inquiry that it was hard to cope with the other, darker side: the uncertainty about food, shelter and personal safety.<sup>43</sup>

3.12 At the Sydney hearings a young person who experienced homelessness for a number of years before returning to education and finding employment, reflected on the attraction street life can have for some young people, casting that attraction in terms of deprivation:

*... kids don't know where to go and they end up going and hanging out with gangs who feel like family to them and so you'll back each other up, but then you just end up getting into all sorts of trouble.*<sup>44</sup>

3.13 A number of services spoke and wrote about the vulnerability of young people to exploitation in the face of their unmet needs.<sup>45</sup> Key College, an alternative school in Sydney, placed these unmet needs in terms of an experience of having been let down by family, education and society:

*So what do they do? They go out and they find unsuitable peers, they find people that will take advantage of them. They get involved with drugs, they get involved with crime, all, I think, motivated by this sense of wanting to fit in somewhere, wanting to belong.*<sup>46</sup>

3.14 In a combined submission, Queensland Public Law Interest Clearing House with a number of other key services warned the Commissioners to be careful when assessing evidence of resilience in the face of danger and difficulty, reminding the Inquiry that an ability to cope:

*... should not disguise the face that [these young people] are still children, who have basic needs which are not being met by society.*<sup>47</sup>

This point was emphasised by a young woman in Brisbane who told the Commissioners:

*... nobody chooses to be homeless.*<sup>48</sup>

3.15 Not all of the direct evidence provided by young people was about life on the street. Young people also gave accounts of some of the events that led to their homelessness and many talked about sheltering with a range of people in their social and kin networks.<sup>49</sup> The experience of couch-surfing with friends, friends' parents and with acquaintances was common to many young people who provided evidence to the Inquiry.<sup>50</sup> Often the experience was difficult. One young person described staying with an ex-boyfriend:

*... who I had only just started talking to again. It was uncomfortable and sad.*<sup>51</sup>

Another wrote about being aware of the strain she was putting on the household:

*My best mate is letting me stay at her house. She has a baby and it's hard [on] her ...*<sup>52</sup>

One young woman talked about running out of options:

*...I have lived in about 13 to 14 different places. I moved from friend's house to friend's house. Eventually I ran out of places ...*<sup>53</sup>

Another told a similar story:

*I was just going from friend's place to friend's place until basically all their parents said, you know, he can't stay here any more ...*<sup>54</sup>

3.16 For a number of young witnesses, couch-surfing appeared to precede their contact with support services.<sup>55</sup>

3.17 While some young people told the Inquiry that they had initially been outside the service system because they were unaware that help existed<sup>56</sup>, other young people talked and wrote about not having easy access to shelters<sup>57</sup>, about finding it difficult to comply with shelter expectations, rules and restrictions<sup>58</sup> and about being evicted or 'exited'.<sup>59</sup> In Brisbane, a young woman talked to the Inquiry about struggling with the decision about whether to stay in a shelter away from her friends or be with her friends, but have to live on the streets:

*... that aspect of my life had become so ingrained into my identity that that's all that I identified with then.*<sup>60</sup>

3.18 The Inquiry also received evidence from young people that they felt safer living on the streets among their peers than in boarding houses, squats, foster homes and shelters.<sup>61</sup> Equally, the Inquiry heard from other young people about the streets being unsafe.<sup>62</sup>

3.19 Queensland Youth Housing Coalition advised the Inquiry that there are some homeless young people who never reach services and remain outside the system:

*... that certainly has come through anecdotally in terms of talking about 'Where are young people?' And they are predominately outside the service system ...*<sup>63</sup>

This assertion is supported by the evidence submitted by Project i, which indicates that different groups of young people, tread different pathways in and through homelessness, some of which do not involve using homeless services.<sup>64</sup> Project i told the Inquiry:

*... we hear the negative story about young people but in fact many of them are doing well and there are reasons why they are doing well. Many of these young people have avoided the homelessness service sector altogether. They have chosen to couch surf. They have chosen to use the generalist youth services if they have had to. They have remained in employment, education and training ... and they typically come from families where there has been no mental illness, no drug and alcohol use in the parenting, a high degree of long-standing conflict around issues of freedom and responsibility, and the young people themselves typically have not had ongoing drug and alcohol issues.*<sup>65</sup>

3.20 In relation to general population of homeless people, there is evidence that only a minority of people, some 14 per cent, are accommodated in the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program.<sup>66</sup>

## Conclusions

3.21 In 1989, the Burdekin Report described the experience of being homeless in Australia, emphasising that:

- young people don't fit a single mould
- age, skill level and maturity influence need, and
- duration of homelessness can be used to categorise young homeless people.<sup>67</sup>

In the subsequent years, our understanding of youth homelessness has become more sophisticated. We know more about who is homeless, why young people become homeless, and what services they might need. Some of that material is examined in subsequent chapters. What appears little changed is the experience of homelessness itself. The Burdekin Report in 1989 presented disturbing evidence about life on the street, life on other people's couches and of exploitation in the face of a need for shelter and safety. That evidence is remarkably consistent with the evidence that has been submitted to the National Youth Commission, suggesting that the experience of being homeless in Australia in 2007 is traumatic, with support often arriving quite late in a young person's journey out of home.

3.22 While the evidence presented to the Inquiry about the experience of being homeless is consistent with the negative experiences reported in the Burdekin Report<sup>68</sup>, there does appear to be new and more positive evidence about young people's encounters with services. Young people submitted evidence to the National Youth Commission that suggests that services can and do get it right. However, problems exist in terms of different sectors being able to work seamlessly to achieve outcomes for young people with multiple issues that require assistance from different sectors of the service system. A second problem is that there are simply not sufficient support services across Australia to deal with at-risk and homeless young people. The evidence about the current response of protective services, health services, early intervention services and accommodation services is examined in some detail in Chapters 13 to 23.

## ENDNOTES

- 1 Young Person, NYC Youth Survey, 13.
- 2 27 young people responded to the Survey.
- 3 For example Young Person, NYC Youth Survey, 9; Young Person, NYC Youth Survey, 8; Young Person, NYC Youth Survey, 6.
- 4 For example include Young Person, NYC Youth Survey, 11; Young Person, NYC Youth Survey, 8; Young Person, NYC Youth Survey, 3.
- 5 For example Young Person, NYC Youth Survey, 1; Young Person, NYC Youth Survey, 8; Young Person, NYC Youth Survey, 10.
- 6 For example Young Person, NYC Youth Survey, 8; Young Person, NYC Youth Survey, 3; Young Person, NYC Youth Survey, 16.
- 7 For example Young Person, NYC Youth Survey, 8; Young Person, NYC Youth Survey, 3; Young Person, NYC Youth Survey, 25.
- 8 For example Young Person, NYC Youth Survey, 9; Young Person, NYC Youth Survey, 14; Young Person, NYC Youth Survey, 19.
- 9 For example Young Person, NYC Youth Survey, 12; Young Person, NYC Youth Survey, 19; Young Person, NYC Youth Survey, 24.

- 10 Young Person, NYC Youth Survey, 9.
- 11 Young Person, NYC Youth Survey, 3.
- 12 Young Person, NYC Youth Survey, 8.
- 13 Young Person, NYC Youth Survey, 1.
- 14 A. Mercrae, Alted Elizabeth College, Hobart Day 17, 03-05-2007 and Submission 13, A. Mercrae, Oenghus Youth Services and Alted Elizabeth College.
- 15 Submission 24, YouthLaw, Young People's Legal Rights Centre.
- 16 Submission 74, Service to Youth Council.
- 17 For example Submission 43, Refugee Youth Issues Network of South Australia; J. McKay, Zig Zag Young Women's Resource Centre, Brisbane Day 6, 11-04-2007; Submission 53, Concerned Workers.
- 18 For example J. McKay, Zig Zag Young Women's Resource Centre, Brisbane Day 6, 11-04-2007; D. Ireson, Adolescent Mothers Support Service and Innovative Health Services for Homeless Youth, Perth Day 19, 07-06-2007; Submission 51, Starting Out, Connections Child, Youth and Family Services, UnitingCare.
- 19 S. Mollasi, Salvation Army Crossroads West, Perth Day 19, 07-06-2007.
- 20 J. McKay, Zig Zag Young Women's Resource Centre, Brisbane Day 6, 11-04-2007.
- 21 For example Young Person, NYC Youth Survey, 8; Young Person, NYC Youth Survey, 3; Young Person, NYC Youth Survey, 26.
- 22 Young Person, NYC Youth Survey, 18.
- 23 For example Young Person, NYC Youth Survey, 26; Young Person, NYC Youth Survey, 2; Young Person, NYC Youth Survey, 4.
- 24 For example Young Person, NYC Youth Survey, 11; Young Person, NYC Youth Survey, 2.
- 25 Young Person, NYC Youth Survey, 19.
- 26 Young Person, NYC Youth Survey, 11.
- 27 For example Young Person, NYC Youth Survey, 25; Young Person, NYC Youth Survey, 4; Young Person, NYC Youth Survey, 19.
- 28 Young Person, NYC Youth Survey, 26.
- 29 For example Young Person, NYC Youth Survey, 25 and Young Person, NYC Youth Survey, 14.
- 30 Young Person, NYC Youth Survey, 12.
- 31 Young Person, NYC Youth Survey, 25.
- 32 Young Person, NYC Youth Survey, 11.
- 33 Young Person, NYC Youth Survey, 18.
- 34 M. Johnson, Shelter SA, Adelaide Day 15, 26-04-2007.
- 35 Young Person, Melbourne Day 14, 24-04-2007.
- 36 Young Person, Brisbane Day 6, 11-04-2007.
- 37 Young Person, Perth Day 20, 08-06-2007.
- 38 Young Person, Sydney Day 9, 17-04-2007.
- 39 For example Young Person, NYC Youth Survey, 1; Young Person, NYC Youth Survey, 2; Young Person, NYC Youth Survey, 5.
- 40 For example Young Person, NYC Youth Survey, 1; Young Person, NYC Youth Survey, 23; Young Person, NYC Youth Survey, 8.
- 41 Young Person, NYC Youth Survey, 6.
- 42 Young Person, Brisbane Day 5, 10-04-2007.
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- 44 Young Person, Sydney Day 9, 17-04-2007.
- 45 For example M. Visschedijk, YWCA Canberra, Canberra Day 11, 19-04-2007; Submission 66, Homeless Persons' Legal Clinic, Queensland Public Interest Law Clearing House with Brisbane Youth Service, Salvation Army Youth Outreach Service, Australian Red Cross; Y. Paterakis, DAISY, Centacare NT, Darwin Day 4, 04-04-2007.
- 46 B. Eviston, Key College, Youth Off The Streets, Sydney Day 9, 17-04-2007.
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- 50 For example Young Person, NYC Youth Survey, 1; Young Person, NYC Youth Survey, 2; Young Person, NYC Youth Survey, 8.
- 51 Young Person, NYC Youth Survey, 17.

- 52 Young Person, NYC Youth Survey, 23.
- 53 Young Person, NYC Youth Survey, 11.
- 54 Young Person, Sydney Day 9, 17-04-2007.
- 55 For example Young Person, NYC Youth Survey, 6; Young Person, NYC Youth Survey, 11; Young Person, NYC Youth Survey, 17.
- 56 Young Person, Brisbane Day 5 and Young Person, Melbourne Day 13, 23-04-2007.
- 57 For example Young Person Brisbane Day 6, 11-04-2007; Young Person, NYC Youth Survey, 12; Young Person, NYC Youth Survey, 24.
- 58 For example Young Person Sydney Day 9, 17-04-2007; Young Person, NYC Youth Survey, 20; Young Person Darwin Day 4, 04-04-2007.
- 59 For example Young Person Sydney Day 9, 17-04-2007; Young Person, NYC Youth Survey, 21; Young Person, NYC Youth Survey, 24.
- 60 Young Person, Brisbane Day 5, 10-04-2007.
- 61 For example Young Person, Brisbane Day 5, 10-04-2007; Young Person, NYC Youth Survey, 6; Young Person, Brisbane Day 5, 10-04-2007.
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# 4

Homelessness is not 'rooflessness'. In Australia, it is widely accepted that homelessness should be broadly defined as being without shelter, in an improvised dwelling, in any form of temporary shelter including SAAP services or a temporary stay with a friend or acquaintance and residence in single rooms in boarding houses without facilities or security of tenure. In the ABS Census 2001, there were 100,000 homeless people - men, women and children – one third (36,173) were young people aged from 12 – 24 years of age. There were another 9,941 children under the age of 12. Both structural and individual factors cause homelessness for young people. The latest statistics in 2006 reveal 21,940 homeless teenagers aged 12-18, a decline from 26,060 in 2001. This drop has been attributed to the totality of early intervention between 2001 and 2006, not the decline in youth unemployment since the early nineties. On the other hand, the crisis in housing affordability and increased pressure on state care systems are factors that tend to drive homelessness upwards. In 2005-06, in terms of homeless people using SAAP services, 35.5 per cent of clients or 36,700 young Australians were young people. There was also an additional 54,700 children accompanying an adult(s). Turnaway rates as measured by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare show that about half of the of potential clients of SAAP are not able to be accommodated on any night.





## Chapter 4 | Incidence of homelessness

4.1 For a long time, the homelessness field was awash with a plethora of different definitions. There appeared to be little agreement in conceptual terms and narrow 'literal' definitions of rough sleepers and shelter users were used when it came to constructing statistical data on homelessness. From 1985 onwards, the National Youth Coalition for Housing and the definition embedded in the legislation covering the provision of the Supported Accommodation and Assistance Program which referred to homeless and at-risk' individuals, have been major points of reference. The definition in the Supported Accommodation and Assistance Act (1994) was primarily about who could be eligible for SAAP services<sup>1</sup>:

*A person is homeless if, and only if he/she has inadequate access to safe and secure housing. A person is taken to have inadequate access to safe and secure housing if the only housing to which a person has access:*

- (a) damages or is likely to damage a person's health; or*
- (b) threatens a person's safety; or*
- (c) marginalises the person by failing to provide:*
  - (i) adequate personal amenities; or*
  - (ii) economic and social support that a home normally affords; or*
- (d) places the person in circumstances which threaten or adversely affect the adequacy, safety, security and affordability of that housing.*

This definition involves a degree of subjectivity on the part of the presenting individual, but gives scope for services to work with people at-risk of homelessness as well as people who are actually homeless.

4.2 An alternative definition by researchers Chamberlain and Mackenzie<sup>2</sup> uses categories that describe settings and circumstances in which people should be considered homeless.

*Primary homelessness: people without conventional accommodation such as those who 'sleep out', or use derelict buildings, cars, railway stations for shelter.*

*Secondary homelessness: people who frequently move from temporary accommodation such as emergency accommodation, refuges, and temporary shelters. People may use boarding houses or family accommodation just on a temporary basis.*

*Tertiary homelessness: people who live in rooming houses, boarding houses on medium or long-term where they do not have their own bathroom and kitchen facilities and tenure is not secured by a lease.*

The definition is referred to as a 'cultural' definition because it uses a putative cultural standard as to what most Australians expect as a bottom line of acceptable accommodation in contemporary society. This is socially inter-subjective but also sufficiently objective to be used for collecting quantitative data on homelessness. As such, this definition has been adopted by the Australian Bureau of Statistics<sup>3</sup>, and is widely quoted for policy purposes.

4.3 The 1989 HREOC Inquiry faced a problem because the size of the homeless youth population had not been established. The difficulties of quantifying such a transient population were well recognized but little had been done since the 1983 Senate Inquiry<sup>4</sup>. Many homeless young people were essentially 'hidden' from statistical counting and it was difficult to distinguish long-term homeless young people from those experiencing a temporary crisis that might be resolved in a relatively short period of time with little or no intervention by a service. The report commented that:

*There are no reliable measures, in fact very few measures at all, of the incidence of child and youth homelessness ... (and) ... due to the lack of government and other data, however, it is very difficult to assess how many children and young people are homeless*<sup>5</sup>.

In order to address this informational deficit, the Inquiry commissioned Dr Rodney Fopp<sup>6</sup> to provide an estimate of the size of the homeless youth population.

4.4 Dr Rodney Fopp's estimation of the size of the homeless youth population was the first serious attempt to establish the size of the problem. After receiving Dr Fopp's report and conducting hearings throughout Australia, the Inquiry concluded that:

*Sufficient research has now been compiled, however, to enable the inquiry to estimate that there are at least 20,000 – 25,000 homeless children and young people across the country. We stress that we consider this to be a conservative estimate. Dr Fopp's considered conclusion, based on all the evidence available, was that the likely figure is actually 50,000 to 70,000 children and young people who are homeless or at serious risk.*<sup>7</sup>

There was some initial confusion about the two estimates, however, the media responded expansively to the findings of the HREOC Inquiry that 'youth homelessness' was a significant social problem in Australia that required urgent remedial Government ac-

tion. The larger 50-70,000 estimate was frequently quoted in media stories about youth homelessness at the time, despite the more cautious position stated by Commissioner Burdekin and his colleagues.

4.5 A critique of the 50,000 – 70,000 estimate of 12-24 year old homeless youth by researchers Mackenzie and Chamberlain pointed out the fact that the estimate conflated ‘actually homeless’ and ‘at-risk’ young people. Mackenzie and Chamberlain suggested a more conservative estimate of 15-19,000 homeless young people aged 12-24 years of age on an average night<sup>8</sup>.

4.6 In 1994, Mackenzie and Chamberlain undertook a national census of homeless school students. A large sample frame of 2000 state and Catholic secondary schools were contacted by fax and asked, on the basis of their local knowledge of students in the school, to find out how many homeless students were still at school. Homelessness was defined according to the categories of primary, secondary and tertiary homelessness and enumerated young people who had run away from home and were ‘couch surfing with friends as well as young people who had been homeless for weeks and months. The research revealed 11,000 homeless students (aged 12-18 years). This data produced interest in the possibilities for early intervention but enabled an overall estimate of homelessness in Australia<sup>9</sup>.

4.7 In 1999, these researchers estimated the homeless population in Australia using ABS census data combined with other data on young people using SAAP services. This work known as Counting The Homeless has since 2001 produced detailed information on each state and territory, as well as regional area data on the homeless population. Since 1999, the Australian Bureau of Statistics has produced a paper on the homeless population (Counting The Homeless, 1999; Counting The Homeless 2001, Counting The Homeless 2003 and Counting The Homeless 2006, forthcoming) in Australia following each national census.

4.8 In conjunction with the 2001 ABS census, Mackenzie and Chamberlain determined that there were 12,227 homeless students aged 12-18 years and using information from the SAAP data, they estimated that the population of homeless youth was 26,060 Australia-wide in the age group 12-18 years on Census night 2001<sup>10</sup>. The pattern was not evenly spread across jurisdictions.

**Table 1: No. & rate of youth homelessness (12 to 18 yrs), by state and territory, 2001**

	NSW	Vic	ACT	Qld	SA	WA	Tas	NT	All
Estimated number	6,242	4,663	400	6,381	2,394	3,508	1,008	1,464	26,060
Rate	10	10	12.5	18	17	18	21	69	14

**Source:** National Census of Homeless School Students and SAAP Client Collection.

Victoria along with new South Wales and the ACT cluster with 10 homeless youth per 1000, while the other states of Queensland, South Australia, Western Australia and

Tasmania have higher rates of homelessness. In the Northern Territory the rate of youth homelessness was found to be significantly higher than elsewhere – 69 per 1000. This pattern was broadly congruent with the distribution of the homeless population overall by state and territory.

4.9 In *Counting The Homeless 2001*, Mackenzie and Chamberlain provided an estimate of the homelessness population in Australia – a total of 99,900 individuals on Census night – men, women and children.

**Table 2: Age breakdown of homeless population, 2001**

	N	%
Under 12	9,941	10
12 - 18	26,060	26
19 – 24	10,113	10
25 – 65 or older	53,786	54
	99,900	100

**Source:** Census of Population and Housing 2001, SAAP Client Collection in 2001

4.10 About 36 per cent or one third of the homeless population were young people 12-24 years of age. Approximately two-thirds of the homeless youth aged 12-18 years of age are outside the education system despite being of school age. Many students who become homeless whilst at school must eventually leave the school system. Homeless young people aged 19-24 years are mostly not in education or training and either unemployed or not in the labour force. There were an additional 9,941 children under the age of 12 years who were homeless, in nearly all cases accompanying their parent(s) or other adult carers. If children under 12 years of age are included, some 46 per cent or almost half of the homeless population are children and young people under the age of 25.

## Youth homelessness in 2006

4.11 The most recent determination of youth homelessness for 12-18 year olds as part of *Counting The Homeless 2006* was available to this Inquiry<sup>11</sup>. The main finding was that the number of homeless youth had decreased between 2001 and 2006 from 26,060 to 21,940.

**Table 3: No. & rate of youth homelessness (12 to 18 yrs), by state and territory, 2006**

	NSW	Vic	ACT	Qld	SA	WA	Tas	NT	All
Estimated number	4,987	3,896	307	4,469	2,129	4,280	770	1,102	21,940
Rate	8	8	10	11	15	21	16	50	11

**Source:** National Census of Homeless School Students 2006 and SAAP Client Collection, 2006.

The eastern seaboard states of New South Wales and the ACT, Victoria and now Queensland had the lowest cluster of homeless rates. Queensland was 18 per 1000 in 2001 but down to 11 per 1000 in 2006. While not exactly reproductive of 2001, the distribution across jurisdictions was broadly similar. Again the Northern Territory had

the highest rate of 50 per 1000 in 2006. The researcher's caveat for the Northern Territory was to point out that many Indigenous youth are outside of secondary education.

4.12 Explanations for homelessness tend to be constructed either in terms of micro 'individual' issues or macro 'structural' factors, although most sociological accounts draw on both individual and structural factors to explain homelessness.

4.13 Individual factors include sexual, physical or emotional abuse, conflict within families, mental health and drug and alcohol problems, a disability or the personality issues of a particular individual can impact on their relationships at home and school. Welfare professionals frequently express concerns that focusing on individual factors leads to attributing homelessness entirely to the individual and ignores the larger issues in society.

4.14 Structural factors are macro-factors such as the state of the local labour market which determines the extent to which young people can access employment (unemployment rate) and earn sufficient income to pay their rent and other living costs; or the availability and affordability of housing which affects how much young people have to pay out of their income to rent independent accommodation or share households in the private market or in public and community housing; income support benefits and legal determinations which affect what is available to young people. Other macro-level factors include the operation of government programs, services and institutions such as care and protection, juvenile justice and the area of drug and alcohol treatment.

4.15 The NYC Inquiry accepts that both levels affect the lives of young people and policy must address larger structural issues while at the same time provide support and assistance to individual homeless youth with attention to how much needs to be done to make a significant difference.

4.16 MacKenzie and Chamberlain examine the relationship between unemployment and employment for young people and youth homelessness. Their earliest research on the extent of youth homelessness was undertaken in the early 1990s when there was a period of deep economic recession. Overall, unemployment rose from 5 per cent in 1990 to 11.5 per cent in 1993 and youth unemployment peaked at about 30 per cent. This sudden rise in unemployment correlated with an increase in the number of homeless youth from 10,000 in 1991 to 21,000 in 1994.

4.17 After 1994, youth unemployment gradually dropped to 18 per cent in 2001. This is still a high rate of unemployment and leaves some young people highly marginalised in an improving labour market. Over the same period, youth homelessness continued to increase to 26,060 in August 2001. This suggests that there is no simple relationship between unemployment and youth homelessness, if reducing unemployment is associated with increasing homelessness.

4.18 Youth unemployment continued to decline. In June 2001, the youth unemployment rate was 18 per cent but had declined to 15 per cent by June 2006. Between 2001 and 2006 the relationship between homelessness and youth unemployment reverses. During the same period youth homelessness came down by 16 per cent from 26,060 to 21,940.

4.19 The researchers argued that:

*The small drop in the unemployment rate probably enabled some homeless teenagers, including school students, to obtain either casual or part-time work. However, it seems unlikely that the decline in unemployment was either large enough, or sudden enough, to explain much of the decline in youth homelessness.*

They conclude that:

*The major change that did occur after 2001 was the increase in early intervention services targeting homeless and at risk teenagers.*

4.20 The early intervention capacity referred to includes the establishment of the Reconnect program between 1999 and 2003 by the Australian Government specifically targeted to youth aged 12 to 18 to achieve ‘family reconciliation, wherever practicable, between homeless young people or those at risk of homelessness and their families’, and to improve the engagement of homeless and at-risk youth in employment, education and training. Reconnect was a major initiative designed to reduce youth homelessness<sup>12</sup>.

4.21 However, school welfare resources have been substantially improved and extended, particularly in some jurisdictions. Victoria rebuilt its complement of Student Welfare Coordinators in secondary schools and South Australia has been steadily increasing the number of Student Welfare Coordinators in both primary and secondary schools. The ACT has created youth work positions attached to ACT schools. Schools now typically work more closely with local youth agencies whereas in the mid-nineties this was relatively rare.

4.22 Several jurisdictions have developed other programs. In Queensland, the Youth Support Coordinators program has deployed 113 workers throughout the State to facilitate early intervention with at-risk young people especially secondary students. In Victoria, beginning in 1998 the School Focused Youth Service provided 41 workers throughout Victoria to assist the building of local area networks between schools and community agencies. Also in Victoria, the Family Reconciliation and Mediation Program (FRMP) is mandated to undertake Reconnect-type early intervention where there is no access to Reconnect, as a way of filling gaps.

4.23 Finally, SAAP youth services also are more aware of the opportunities for early intervention than in the early 1990s. Some SAAP services also provide a Reconnect service and cooperation between services and schools have become more widely established than it was in the mid-1990s.

4.24 The totality of the ‘early intervention’ effort has evidently had some effect and Mackenzie and Chamberlain conclude:

*The two factors most likely to be associated with the decrease in youth homelessness are early intervention and the improved labour market for young people. The labour market has improved and it is easier for school students to find part-time or casual employment. However, the small decline in youth unemployment between 2001 and 2006 cannot explain most of the decrease in youth homelessness. On the other hand, Australia’s early intervention capacity has developed considerably over the past 10 years, and particularly*

*over the past five years ... early intervention appears to account for most of the decrease in youth homelessness since 2001.*

This is an encouraging result whereby there is statistical evidence and a plausible argument based on evidence that a policy is having some effect.

4.25 While the NYC Inquiry accepts this positive result, the breakout of the housing affordability crisis, particularly evident over the past two years, is a sobering caveat to an otherwise optimistic prognosis. It should be noted that in the early nineties, youth homelessness doubled under conditions of high unemployment and recession, and while economic conditions are different – close to full employment in a growth economy - the pressure on housing costs and rents is likely to affect homeless young people and homeless people generally, more than other groups in the community. Many witnesses expressed concern about the escalating cost of rental housing.

### **Using SAAP services**

4.26 ABS Counting The Homeless reports provide estimates for the number of people on Census night using the ABS definition. The other statistics on youth homelessness are the number of young people entering and leaving SAAP services who require supported accommodation.

4.27 Since the 1989 Inquiry, a world-class data collection of the Supported Accommodation and Assistance Program has been developed which provides state and territory annual reports as well more detailed agency level reports<sup>13</sup>. This commenced in 1996 and continues to the present day. This has been a major achievement and it sets a standard for the development of data collections for other youth programs.

4.28 The SAAP Annual report for 2005-06 reported that 161,200 individuals in total were assisted through SAAP, and of these 106,500 were adults and 54,700 were children accompanying an adult parent(s). Altogether these people received help on 180,000 occasions and the average was 1.7 periods of support. A support period is the period of time that a person is receiving assistance from a SAAP service as a client. Some SAAP clients receive help on multiple occasions. Apart from accompanying children, 35.5 per cent or 36,700 of SAAP clients were young people, some 2000 were under 15 years of age, 19,100 were 15-19 years and 15,600 were 20-24 years. This means that in 2005-06 a total of 91,400 children and young people received support and/or supported accommodation from SAAP services in Australia<sup>14</sup>.

4.29 The other information provided by the National Data Collection Agency at the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare is the demand for SAAP services and accommodation. Measuring turn-away rates or demand for services is a technically complex issue. The Demand for Accommodation Collection is conducted twice a year over a two-week period. Not all requests for assistance are valid since some of the people making requests are not eligible under the SAAP Act or agency operational guidelines<sup>15</sup>.

4.30 During the two weeks of the Demand for Accommodation Collection, a daily

average of 251 valid requests for immediate accommodation that could not be provided (valid unmet requests for accommodation) were recorded. Requests were made by 332 people (212 potential clients and 120 accompanying children) -after allowing for people who made a valid unmet request for accommodation but were accommodated later in the day, some 304 people (193 potential clients and 111 accompanying children) could not be accommodated. Altogether, 7,409 people were accommodated in SAAP – 7,242 were already in SAAP and continuing their accommodation from the previous day, while there were 166 clients were newly accommodated.<sup>16</sup>

4.31 Turnaway rates are a third measure of unmet need or expressed demand. On average about half (54%) of the people who turn up seeking help from SAAP services are turned away each night.

**Table 4: Adults and unaccompanied children: daily request for accommodation turn-away rate and unmet demand to total demand for accommodation ratio, by state and territory, Australia, 1–7 December 2004 and 11–17 May 2005 (daily average number of people)**

	NSW	Vic	Qld	WA	SA	Tas	ACT	NT	All
Total daily requests (no)	105	61	81	44	29	16	11	13	360
Turn-away rate from youth services (%)	65	66	51	76	51	32	44	54	33
Total turn-away rate (%)	55	59	53	49	47	57	71	36	54

The turnaway from youth services are those services specifically targeted for young people. The high turnaway rate for Western Australia suggests a lower proportion of available youth services in SAAP in that state and in the ACT, the turn-over rate is the highest in Australia given that the ACT is a city-state but access to youth services is somewhat better than for some other groups in the homeless population.

4.32 Information about demand, however measured, is the link between a large homeless population of about 100,000 individuals, of whom 46 per cent are children and young people, while 35.5 per cent are young people from 12-24 years of age and the relative small scale of available supported accommodation. The inferences that might be made about SAAP are complex judgements. One inference may be that people do not approach SAAP accommodation because of the known difficulty of obtaining access.

*The low percentage of new requests for SAAP accommodation on a daily basis suggests that people in need of accommodation may not be approaching SAAP agencies because they are aware of the difficulty of obtaining SAAP accommodation.*<sup>17</sup>

4.33 A second inference is that people who do approach SAAP may not be making repeat requests.

*That the number of valid unmet requests for immediate accommodation is not considerably larger than the number of people seeking such accommodation suggests that people seeking SAAP accommodation do not make repeated attempts if they fail initially.*<sup>18</sup>

4.34 Finally, there is the issue of expressed demand and increased capacity.



*... few potential clients seeking immediate accommodation make more than one attempt at appropriate SAAP agencies (251 valid unmet requests for immediate accommodation divided by the 212 potential clients who made those requests = 1.18). However, unsuccessful groups may split up and retry in other combinations and the extent to which this happens is not known. Furthermore, referrals for other accommodation are not always obtained once a person has been unsuccessful. Each day, on average, only just over half (52%) of the valid unmet requests for SAAP accommodation were formally referred on to accommodation at another source (derived from Tables 5.2 and 6.4). This may be telling many potential clients that SAAP accommodation is difficult to obtain and that trying at another agency is unlikely to prove successful on that day. They might, however, try again on subsequent days. For these reasons, it is important to note that increasing the capacity of SAAP to accommodate more people may not necessarily mean that the rate of people turned away would decrease. It may be that once more space becomes available those people who have previously not sought or who have given up seeking accommodation may try to obtain accommodation.*<sup>19</sup>

## Summary

4.35 The HREOC Inquiry in 1989 expressed grave concern about the lack of statistical data on youth homelessness in Australia<sup>20</sup>. That position has changed over nearly twenty years. The collection of data on people using SAAP services began in the early 1990s and since 1996 has evolved into the most sophisticated data collection of its type internationally. Researchers have produced statistical data on the broader homeless population in conjunction with the Australian Bureau of Statistics. This work in the form of Counting The Homeless 2006 has been supported and funded by the Australian Government and all state and territory jurisdictions.

4.36 In the 2001 ABS Census, approximately one third or 36 per cent of the homeless population of 99,900 individuals were children and young people under the age of 25 years. There were 9,941 children under the age of 12 years, mostly accompanying their parent(s), 26,060 youth aged 12 to 18 years and 10,113 young people aged 19 to 24 years. Youth homelessness increased during the 1990s. In 1991, researchers estimated about 10,000 homeless youth aged 12 to 18 years, which had increased to 26,060 in 2001.

4.37 Between, 2001 and 2006 the number of homeless youth aged 12 to 18 years of age has dropped from 26,060 to 21,940. The inference for why this decrease in the number of homeless young people is that 'early intervention' has been the primary driver for this improvement. However, this conclusion was tempered by reference to the steep rise in private rental – the crisis of affordable housing – which has received a great deal of attention in the media since early in 2007. The increase in reported cases of child abuse and neglect is another factor that would tend to drive up the number of young people becoming homeless.

## ENDNOTES

- 1 On-line text of Supported Accommodation Assistance Act 1994 at [www.infoxchange.net.au/SAAP/saap3.htm](http://www.infoxchange.net.au/SAAP/saap3.htm).
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- 8 MacKenzie, D. & Chamberlain, C. (1992) 'How Many Homeless Youth?' *Youth Studies Australia*, 11(4), 14-22.
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- 11 Chamberlain, C. & Mackenzie, D. (2008) *Youth Homelessness in Australia 2006*, Melbourne: Counting The Homeless 2006 project.
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- 14 Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2006) *Homeless People in SAAP: Australia: SAAP National Data Collection annual report 2005-06*, Canberra: AIHW
- 15 Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2006) *Demand for SAAP assistance by homeless people 2004-05: SAAP National Data Collection Agency (NDCA) report series 9*, Canberra: AIHW
- 16 Ibid, p.63 and Table 9.1 on p.68
- 17 Ibid, p.66.
- 18 Ibid, p.67
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# 5

Youth homelessness does not involve a particular type of young person but a process of events that happen in a young person's life. The 'youth homeless career' is a typology of that process for young people, tracing the main changes that can occur following family breakdown. Young adults can become homeless when their relationship with a partner fails and they lose their accommodation because they are forced to leave the family home. Or, some young people can become homeless due to accumulating debt and a financial crisis resulting in loss of housing. Melbourne University's Project i examined the experiences of homeless young people in close detail in a longitudinal study of pathways through homelessness. The focus on 'careers' and pathways sensitises policy decision-makers about when to intervene and distinguishes different interventions along a time dimension. The emergence of 'early intervention' was bound up with the understanding of homelessness as a process.



## Chapter 5 | Homelessness as a Process

5.1 One of the most important shifts in thinking about homelessness is the now widely accepted view that homelessness should be thought of as a process – of becoming homeless, being homeless, but also re-establishing a livelihood and a place in the community after being homeless for a period of time.

5.2 Prior to the HREOC report in 1989, (the Burdekin Report) youth homelessness was described in terms of what caused homelessness, the reasons why young people became homeless and the state of being homeless. During the 1980s, youth homelessness was generally depicted in the media in terms of stereotypes of ‘street kids’. Whereas, in the Burdekin Report there was a great deal of detail on the circumstances experienced by 100 young people interviewed by Dr Ian O’Connor for the Inquiry, the stereotypical representations of homeless youth was not challenged in any major way. However, the report distinguished between young people ‘temporarily detached’ from family, who leave home after a domestic altercation but return after cooling off<sup>1</sup>. Their period of homelessness is for ‘quite short periods’. Then there are young people who leave home but require assistance only temporarily and they resolve their issues relatively quickly – within weeks or over a few months. However a third group experience homelessness over an extended period of time and might be described as ‘chronically homeless’

5.3 MacKenzie and Chamberlain developed a sociological account of homelessness proposing the concept of a ‘homeless career’. They first developed this characterisation in the early 1990s<sup>2</sup> when they examined the temporal issue of how long young people experienced homelessness. They had noticed that not all young people who presented to the inner city Melbourne information and referral service The Info Deli seemed to fit the ‘street kids’ typology. Some were recently homeless but travelled to the inner city and others had been homeless for much less than one year.

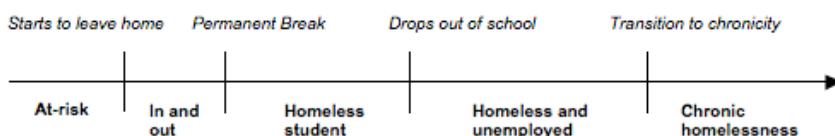
5.4 Mackenzie and Chamberlain’s ‘homeless career’ is a sociological representation. As a sociological term, the ‘career’ refers to an ideal-typical process of transitional

stages involved in the development of forms of biographical identity<sup>3</sup>. The concept of a 'homeless career' describes the process of change as young people become homeless and pass through various phases before they develop a self-identity as a chronically homeless person. The homeless career 'calls attention to the factors that influence movement from one stage (of the process) to another'<sup>4</sup>. The earliest representations of homeless careers were linear trajectories pointing towards 'chronic homelessness' where homelessness had become a way of life or a very long-term predicament in someone's life. However, homeless typologies are as much about points of exit from homelessness as they are about becoming and remaining homeless. Most young people who become homeless will recover more stable accommodation and their pathway out of homelessness and the duration of their homeless experience depends very much on how much support and assistance they receive and how timely that is at critical junctures. Only a minority will traverse the entire career and become chronically homeless.

5.5 Later work delineated three career types – a youth career, a family breakdown career and a housing crisis career. The youth career is strictly what happens when young people exit the family home due to a breakdown in familial relations and become homeless. The family breakdown career can involve young people in their own family households where relations between the young adult partners breaks down often involving domestic violence and a parent, usually with children, becomes homeless as a result. Lastly, the housing crisis is where individuals or family become homeless as a result of accumulating debt leading to eviction, loss of accommodation and homelessness.

5.6 Young people who become homeless during their teenage years experience conflict within the family leading to a breakdown in family relationships between parents and children. The conflict can take many forms and range from conflict over restrictions and rules to physical violence and sexual abuse. Sometimes, someone in the family suffers mental health issues and this can bring relationships under stress to the point of breakdown. Similarly, if a family member has drug or alcohol problems this can eventually reach a crisis point. At first running away from home or staying with friends (ie in and out) may continue to the point where the young person finally makes a 'permanent break' from their family. Many young people do not immediately drop out of school. They stay with friend's families and try to attend school. Help at this point can sometimes achieve reconciliation with family, or if that is not possible, the student can be supported to live independently while continuing at school.

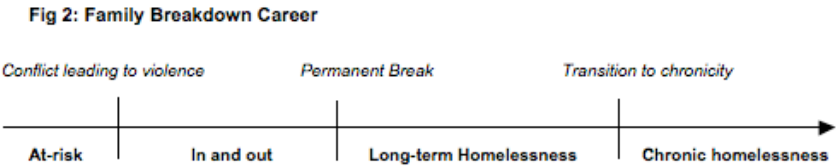
**Fig 1: Homeless Youth Career**



5.7 The family breakdown career is where adults in families usually with children experience a breakdown in their relationship. Conflict mounts and intensifies often accompanied by family violence and eventually one party – usually a woman with

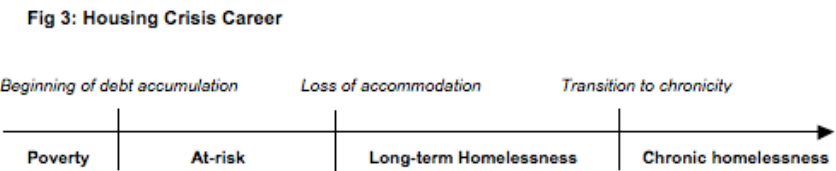
children – leaves the broken conflicted relationship and becomes homeless. A component of SAAP provides shelter and protection for such women escaping domestic violence. Women escaping domestic violence may leave and return many times before abandoning their partner.

5.8 In many ways, MacKenzie and Chamberlain’s ‘family breakdown career’ is analogous to the youth career in that the breakdown in human relationships is the main driver for becoming homeless.



The permanent break is a choice made under duress usually after a long history of conflict and violence. About one third of SAAP clients are women/ families escaping domestic violence.

5.9 The third homeless career identified by Mackenzie and Chamberlain was called the Housing Crisis Career where accumulating debt eventually reaches a point where eviction occurs or the leasee ‘does a runner’ and the individual or family loses their accommodation and becomes homeless. This typology emphasizes that in a situation of poverty people are particularly vulnerable to the effects of a sudden loss of income due to illness, loss of job or bad financial behaviour. The main driver of homelessness here is the accumulation of debt even though in most cases there are also other issues as well.



5.10 Families at risk of homelessness were the target group of a small FaCSIA program of eight services, one in each state and territory jurisdiction, called the Household Organisational Management Expenses (HOME) Advice program. This initiative was theoretically underpinned by the Housing Crisis Career typology. An evaluation of the HOME Advice program estimated that the number of families at risk of homelessness ranged from a conservative 7800 to a more realistic 15,800 at a point in time, however over a year, the number of highly at-risk families could be at least 15,000 to 30,0005.

5.11 The delineation of ‘homeless careers’ identifies theoretically the key trajectories by which people become homeless. In reality, homelessness is a complex process involving many factors and issues.

5.12 Another important study that has deepened the understanding of youth homelessness as a process has been Project i. This was a five-year study of homeless young people in Melbourne and Los Angeles from 2000-2005. The study undertook a longitudinal follow-up of newly homeless young people using surveys and interviews. The sample comprised 165 newly homeless (77 males and 88 females) and 266 experienced homeless young people (266 males and 261 females) who were recruited from 95 services across metropolitan Melbourne between December 2000 and August 2002. Follow-up surveys were undertaken with the 165 newly homeless young people at 3,6,12, 18 and 24-month intervals. Much of the analysis has been produced on the basis of the interviews with 40 young people from the newly homeless sample 18 months after they were first contacted.

5.13 Mallett and Rosenthal found that young people became homeless either because of problematic experiences (running away) or a desire for a life change (running to). They found one third of young people left because of family violence, which in most cases had occurred over a long period of time. Another third reported parental alcohol or drug use as the main reason they had left, while another third left home from 'a desire for independence and to loosen the strictures of parental control'<sup>6</sup>.

5.14 The researcher decided that 'family conflict' as a reason for leaving home was too broad and focused on the four most common reasons for leaving: domestic violence, personal or parental drug and alcohol use, personal anxiety and depression and finally a desire for adventure and independence. In the sample about one third became homeless because of violence in the family and in most cases this had been happening for a long-time. One third cited drug and /or alcohol use by themselves or parents as the main reason, while another one third left home seeking independence. In some case this was driven by stressful conditions at home. A small number of young people said that anxiety and depression were the main reason they left home. Despite the small size of the sample the longitudinal combination of survey and interview with follow-up over time, illuminates in closer detail the processes whereby young people experience homelessness<sup>7</sup>.

5.15 The Key Centre for Women's Health in Society presented evidence indicating that young homeless people and the families from which they originate are not homogenous, but can be usefully grouped.<sup>8</sup> In *Moving Out, Moving On*, a report of selected results from Project i, the Centre's collaborative study with the Centre of Community Health at the University of California, the Centre suggests that young homeless people in identifiable living situations appear to have distinct clusters of family background and personal issues.<sup>9</sup> The Centre uncovered four broad family background pictures that corresponded with the particular living situations the young people in the study found themselves in 18 months after they were newly homeless.

5.16 Street Based Group - the first and smallest group, described as unstable homeless, had been living on the streets or in a service for six months or less. Most of the group shared a family background of poverty, neglect and violence with protective services' involvement.

5.17 Service-based group - the second group, described as stable homeless, had been living in a service for six months or more. More than half were from culturally and



linguistically diverse backgrounds, more than half were born overseas and a minority were raised by grand-parents before joining their mothers in Australia. Poverty and emotional deprivation weren't issues in these young people's family backgrounds. None of the parents abused illicit drugs and parental alcohol problems and parental mental illness was an exception. A minority of families had experienced a protective services intervention and there was a level of episodic violence from mothers. There was also a lot of cross-cultural and intergenerational conflict. A number of these young people had been thrown out of home.

5.18 Part-time family home group - the third group, described as unstable home, had been living back in their family home, in shared accommodation or in their partner's family home for less than six months. These young people came from diverse backgrounds. In most cases there was little violence, parental mental illness or substance abuse, but there were exceptions.

5.19 Family home/private rental group - the fourth and largest group, described as stable home, had been living back in a family home (including extended family or partner's family), in private rental or in public housing for six months or longer. Parents tended not to have mental health or substance abuse problems and where family violence had occurred it appeared to be episodic during times of crisis. A very small minority came from chaotic families that had experienced protective services' interventions. A desire for independence and adventure and conflict at home were common reasons for leaving.

5.20 Homelessness is not necessarily an experience that only happens once. For some people there are successive crises with the result that secure accommodation is lost at different points in time. Catherine Robinson<sup>10</sup> described this phenomenon as 'iterative homelessness'. This concept highlighted that some people may move in and out of various forms of shelter and accommodation on different occasions so much so that transience is not just through different forms of temporary accommodation but also through situations that would be described as independent living such as a share house.

5.21 Transience is the predominate mode of many people's housing/ sheltered/ homeless lifestyle. Robinson specially described cases where an on-going mental health condition was the underlying cause of the 'iterative homelessness' experience.

*Iterative homelessness is a somewhat imperfect term offered in this research to encourage a conceptualisation of homelessness as repeated uprooting, as a process of repeated attempts to establish a home physically and emotionally. Broadly, the term can be used to refer to the experience of homelessness, which is ongoing and may involve moving from one form of accommodation to the next. Some people may experience this iterative or repeated cycle of losing, searching and maintaining accommodation for a significant part of their lives.*<sup>11</sup>

5.22 The similar concept was mentioned by Mackenzie and Chamberlain who referred to 'episodic homelessness' where homelessness is 'interrupted by relative short periods of stability'<sup>12</sup>. However, the suggestion here was that some people do spend quite long periods living independently although financially precarious and perhaps

with continuing issues until such time as another crisis causes them to lose their accommodation. Analysis of the SAAP data identifies some individuals and families with mental health and drug and alcohol issues, who leave SAAP for insecure housing, as potentially being vulnerable to becoming homeless again. The HOME advice evaluation discussed a sub group of at-risk families who had been homeless but who were experiencing another crisis threatening their housing<sup>13</sup>.

## Summary

5.23 The conceptualisation of youth homelessness as a process of changes in a young person's life course renders homelessness as a dynamic. Young people become homeless at some point and experience homelessness for varying periods of time. Young people move out of a situation of homelessness generally with assistance. The homeless youth career and the various pathway typologies lay out a sequence, however, the process might be best thought of as a cycle – marginalisation from the community through homelessness but then reconnection and re-integration back into the community. This way of thinking sensitises policy to the opportunities for intervention along the temporal continuum of the homeless experience – prevention and early intervention before homelessness or at the earliest stage, crisis intervention and transition support while homeless, and finally post-vention support after homelessness. The complaints from SAAP services about exit points<sup>14</sup> draws attention to the difficulty of securing affordable accommodation for a homeless young person who needs independent living arrangements. Support is available while a young person is in the homelessness service system, but after leaving transitional or medium- and long-term SAAP services the capacity for post-vention support is virtually non-existent. Recycling back through the system is not uncommon (see Chapter 15). Early intervention became a visible position in the policy debate after 10 years and has become widely accepted, yet the Reconnect program has not been expanded to be able to deliver the full-potential of early intervention and prevention (see Chapter 6 and Chapter 13).

## ENDNOTES

- 1 Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (1989) *Our Homeless Children*, AGPS, Canberra, p.43
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- 3 See Goffman, E. (1961) *Asylums*, Harmondsworth: Penguin; Becker, H. (1963) *Outsiders: Studies in the Sociology of Deviance*, New York: Oxford University Press; Snow, D. & Anderson, L. (1993) *Down on their luck: A study of Homeless Street People*, Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press; and Hutson, S. and Liddiard, M. (1994) *Youth Homelessness: The construction of a social issue*, London: MacMillan.
- 4 Snow, D. & Anderson, L. (1993) *Down on their luck: A study of Homeless Street People*, Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, p.273.
- 5 MacKenzie et. al. (2007) *Household Organisational Management Expenses (HOME) Advice Program evaluation report 2007*, Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia.
- 6 Mallett, S., Rosenthal, D., Keys, D. & Myers, P. (2004) *Moving Out, Moving On: Key findings*.
- 7 Ibid.
- 8 S. Mallett, Key Centre for Women's Health in Society, University of Melbourne, Melbourne Day 14, 24-04-2007.

- 9 Mallett, S., Rosenthal, D., Keys, D. & Myers, P. (2006) Moving out, moving on: young people's pathways in and through homelessness in Melbourne, Key Centre for Women's Health in Society, University of Melbourne and Center for Community Health, University of California Los Angeles, Unpublished Manuscript; S. Mallett, D. Rosenthal, D. Keys, P. Myers, A. Tattam, September (2006) Moving out, moving on: key findings, Key Centre for Women's Health in Society, University of Melbourne in partnership with the Office of Housing, Victorian Department of Human Services, available at <[http://www.projecti.org.au/research/momo\\_keyfindings.pdf](http://www.projecti.org.au/research/momo_keyfindings.pdf)>.
- 10 Robinson, C. (2003) Understanding iterative homelessness: the case of people with mental disorders, AHURI final report no. 45, Melbourne: Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute.
- 11 Ibid. p.3.
- 12 MacKenzie, D. & Chamberlain, C. (2003) Homeless Careers: Pathways in and out of homelessness, Melbourne: Swinburne and RMIT Universities, p.27.
- 13 Mackenzie, D. Desmond, K. and A. Steen (2007) Household Organisational Management Expenses (HOME) Advice Program Evaluation Report 2007, Canberra: FaCSIA, p.46.
- 14 Fopp, R. et. al. (2004) Getting Out and Staying Out: Pathways to Independent Living: Best Practice, Critical Interventions and Strategies for Addressing Homelessness in South Australia, AHURI Research & Policy Bulletin, Adelaide: AHURI Southern Research Centre.



# 6

Young people become homeless when primary family relationships breakdown. For young adults living independently, it will be the breakdown of the family unit they have formed that precipitates homelessness. The role of family in youth homelessness is much the same picture as presented in *Our Homeless Children*, some 20 years ago. Family breakdown is a broad term that includes such issues as mental illness, domestic violence, neglect, overcrowding, and generational poverty. The young people whose family support has broken down, and who end up going into state care, are particularly vulnerable to becoming homeless. However, when young people first become homeless, their friends and their friends' families commonly provide shelter and support. This is referred to by the vernacular term 'couch-surfing'. Where young people have extended family members, grandmothers or aunts and uncles often try to help. Without resources and support, these informal social support networks typically breakdown. Young families with young children are a significant sub-group in the homeless population, with some 55,000 children passing through SAAP services in a year. The capacity to work with young homeless mothers or couples and their children needs to be improved systemically and a major prevention response must be implemented for families deemed at-risk of homelessness.



## Chapter 6 | Families in Crisis

*Oh, I became homeless because my mum died and my step dad abused me and I went to my uncle's and then I got kicked out of there because after all that happened I suppose I was a bit angry, but wasn't aware that's why I was angry. I was just a teenager. Yeah, I was about 12 then, and then I went to live with my grandparents and they were into drugs and stuff. So, I couldn't live there either...<sup>1</sup>*

### Introduction

6.1 Young people tend to leave home prematurely when life at home becomes intolerable or relationships fracture. Behind each precipitous departure from home there is often a story of a family under enormous pressure, where the responsible adults fail to parent, care and adequately protect their child for a variety of complex human and structural reasons.

6.2 In Melbourne, the manager of a youth refuge spoke of his observations about why young people become homeless:

*The litany of the causes of youth homelessness is extensive. We can all rattle off a list that will include such things such as mental illness, abuse, poverty, problematic substance abuse, pregnancy, etc, etc, etc. We see these young people every day. However, there seems to be a commonality amongst the young people who come to the refuge, a feature that is the same no matter the configuration of other issues. That is that each young person has experienced the erosion or the defeat of a significant relationship, usually with an adult and usually with an adult, who, in an ideal world, has the role of providing unconditional love and care. And our experience - and we are sure in the experience of other service providers - this is an inescapable reality. Some of these relationships can be restored and some will not be and some should not be.<sup>2</sup>*

6.3 This chapter will look primarily at the evidence presented to the Inquiry about the role of family in youth homelessness and at the factors that impede a family's ability to protect its emotional and support relationships and to care for and shelter its children

into adulthood. Some individual level risk factors are looked at in this chapter, but young peoples' mental health and substance use problems are dealt with separately in Chapters 10 and 11. The structural factors affecting the ability of families to care for their children are discussed in more detail in Chapter 7 Poverty.

## Families

6.4 Although there are some important exceptions, for most young people the step away from home is a step away from a nuclear family in crisis. For some young people extended family members provide the next stop. The story of informal extended family placements is often a story of a second tier of family in crisis. For other young people, friends' families provide the next home becoming, in turn, a third tier of family in crisis.

6.5 Not all young people leaving home prematurely have been living in a nuclear family with their parents. The Inquiry heard particular evidence relating to refugee young people leaving what has been described as constructed families, comprising extended family members who may not necessarily know each other well or share bonds of affection.<sup>3</sup> The Inquiry also heard of young refugees leaving nuclear families comprising members who have experienced significant periods of separation prior to coming to Australia.<sup>4</sup>

6.6 Southern Ethnic Advisory Advocacy Council (Victoria) talked about the families it works with:

*... you have families who are reunited who may not have even lived with each other or seen each other for several years so you suddenly have mothers trying to relate to their children when they have been separated for periods of time.*<sup>5</sup>

6.7 Some young people leave home following unresolved conflict and a breakdown of their relationship with a parent or parents. Other young people may leave a partner and move into homelessness, often with accompanying children. Others leave as singles, but form families during their period of homelessness. Yet others become homeless along with their parents as dependent children. This chapter will look at the crises experienced by all of these combinations of family.

6.8 The evidence submitted to the Inquiry about the causes of youth homelessness is largely congruent with the evidence contained in the Burdekin Report.<sup>6</sup> A slight difference surfaced in relation to the volume of evidence about whether there are incentives for young people to leave home. The NYC received almost no evidence that such incentives exist. Of the scant evidence provided, one mention was made of peer group myths about generous support payments being available for those leaving home<sup>7</sup> and there was a suggestion from a parent that the prospect of losing independent Centrelink benefits provides a financial disincentive to return home<sup>8</sup>. The Inquiry received a great deal of evidence of support from the homelessness sector for programs that aim to reunify families where it is safe to do so.<sup>9</sup> Chapter 13 Early Intervention provides a detailed examination of service responses aimed at supporting and reconciling families and curtailing homelessness. Chapter 9 discusses the relationship between youth homelessness and protective services. Indigenous homelessness is covered in Chapter 12.



## Primary Family Under Stress

6.9 A number of witnesses to the Inquiry raised family breakdown as the rubric under which a multitude of factors that place young people at risk of homelessness can be placed.<sup>10</sup> UnitingCare Burnside cited family breakdown “... as the main cause of youth homelessness” and provided the following list of aggravating factors, which contains structural and familial elements:

- parental unemployment;
- mental illness;
- substance abuse;
- physical, sexual and emotional abuse;
- domestic violence;
- neglect;
- inter-generational poverty;
- overcrowding in small homes;
- poor communication skills;
- complex family dynamics.<sup>11</sup>

Other witnesses provided evidence that teased out these factors or provided additional personal and familial items that acted as reasons for leaving or played a significant role in increasing stress levels in families:

- death of a parent;<sup>12</sup>
- rejection by a parent;<sup>13</sup>
- disability;<sup>14</sup>
- refugee status;<sup>15</sup>
- cultural and generational conflict;<sup>16</sup>
- blended family conflict;<sup>17</sup>
- sexual and gender identity;<sup>18</sup>
- poor parenting skills;<sup>19</sup>

6.10 Witnesses across Australia provided accounts of young people leaving complex family backgrounds. An indicative selection of evidence is included here to provide a glimpse into the families of origin of homeless and at-risk young people and some of the behaviours, situations and problems both the young people themselves and their families can face.

6.11 In Melbourne, Gay and Lesbian Health Victoria and the Australian Research Centre in Sex, Health and Society told the Inquiry that same sex attracted young people are over-represented in the homeless population.<sup>20</sup> The Research Centre recounted the words of a number of young people in the context of disclosing their sexuality in a cultural environment that can be hostile:

*“My father and stepmother believed I wouldn’t be gay if they knocked it out of me, and*

*quite literally used to slam my head against the wall. It gave me a headache, but I'm still gay." Or, "... My father has been physically violent towards me since I was 12. I think it may have been because he had suspicions about my sexuality. I've been committed into a hospital ward a number of times and have almost been bound to a wheelchair" and on it goes. And, then there was the mother who threw out her daughter and said, "Don't come back, until you give your heart to Jesus."<sup>21</sup>*

6.12 The Inquiry heard that violence is not always directed towards young people by parents. A number of services reported an increase in violence directed towards parents.<sup>22</sup> In Tasmania, the Inquiry heard from a manager of a number of early intervention programs:

*We are finding a very significant number of Reconnect clients once we engage with the parents actually report violence from the young person.*<sup>23</sup>

6.13 The Commissioners were advised that levels of shame were high and parents needed to know they could trust a service before they were willing to disclose the problem. A program manager voiced an additional concern about the welfare of young perpetrators in states where family violence legislation excludes perpetrators from their homes.

6.14 Many witnesses spoke of sexual assault occurring within families. Anglicare WA's YES! Housing described the abuse of one young woman it had supported:

*She left her mother's house where there was a complex history of family trauma and abuse, including sexual abuse by her father and a cousin. She left a bedroom in which seven people were sleeping in, including one of the abusers, and stayed with friends and family then was referred to a youth hostel, SAAP service, by a disability service worker.*<sup>24</sup>

In Brisbane, Zig Zag Young Women's Resource Centre told the Inquiry that it provides both housing and long-term therapeutic sexual assault counselling because the correlation between young women and sexual assault and homelessness is so strong.<sup>25</sup>

6.15 The Inquiry heard that at-risk and homeless young people from culturally and linguistically diverse families and young people from refugee families report problems with cultural and generational conflict.<sup>26</sup> In terms of refugee and newly arrived families, a school social worker from Tasmania echoed the observations of many others about the gulf that can open up between parents and children:

*The young people come to school, and they assimilate really quickly and take on Western values and want to do Western things: Australian things. So we often see family dysfunction and breakdown with the clash of cultures. The one thing that parents could reasonably expect to control is their young people. Their lives have had a lot of things out of control, so a lot of effort goes into raising their children the way they see they should. So, it causes huge conflict if the kids start rejecting those ways.*<sup>27</sup>

6.16 Witnesses submitted evidence about the problem of parental mental illness in the families of homeless and at-risk young people.<sup>28</sup> One young woman wrote to the Inquiry about parental mental illness being the cause of her homelessness and her

mother's rejection being the reason why she left:

*I left home just after my 15th birthday. My mum was suffering from depression at the time that I was kicked out. She had previously kicked out my other siblings, which included a sister younger than myself. I wish I had never been kicked out ...*<sup>29</sup>

6.17 Witnesses also submitted evidence about parental substance abuse, with many young people citing it as their reason for leaving home.<sup>30</sup> Launceston City Mission spoke about the experience of talking to young people in youth detention about their background:

*... "Where's your mum and dad?" "Oh, dad's in jail for drug smuggling and dealing and mum died of an overdose" ... Every single one, there are drugs in their story.*<sup>31</sup>

6.18 In Victoria, one young person recalled the difficulties he and his family faced between the time his parents separated when he was three years old and his eventual departure from his mother's home:

*... originally I moved out with my mum and then I moved in with my dad after that, after a couple of years. And then we moved around a bit around Warrnambool, and then I was playing up a bit with my stepmum and that and problems arised there, so it had been probably best if I moved in with mum, to try and break that tension down a bit. But for some reason I was playing up there as well and getting into trouble and getting suspended and all of that, and been a bad boy, basically.*<sup>32</sup>

6.19 A number of witnesses submitted evidence about the death of a parent triggering a family crisis that leads to homelessness.<sup>33</sup> One young woman identified her mother's death as the trigger in a chain of events that led to her homelessness:

*Well, my housing crisis situation all started when my mum passed away ...*<sup>34</sup>

6.20 The Community Living Association advised the Inquiry that people with intellectual disabilities are over represented in the homeless population, that some enter homelessness from care and protection placements while others move from their family home into homelessness.<sup>35</sup>

6.21 The Inquiry was told that some young people are simply rejected by family. A youth worker from Launceston City Mission talked to the Inquiry about the hard reality of family life:

*I can tell you stories, some of the stories I have heard you know, like mum's got a new boyfriend and gone up to the 14 year-old boy and said, "If you ruin this relationship, you're out."*<sup>36</sup>

6.22 Sometimes it's less a question of rejection and more an issue of families reaching breaking point. One young man wrote to the Inquiry about why he left home:

*Left home when 15 years old – kicked out for drugs (pot) and adolescent problems. Anger and confusion over what you were meant to be doing.*<sup>37</sup>

6.23 At other times, the Inquiry heard that parents sometimes have too many personal problems to be able to parent their children. A youth outreach worker in

Canberra advised the Inquiry that frequently the young person is quite capable but the parents are chaotic and in need of assistance.<sup>38</sup>

6.24 The evidence submitted to the Inquiry about the stresses and crises in different young people's families of origin shares the elements of human suffering and family conflict, but the evidence also presents a picture of diversity and complexity where structural causes combine with particular family risk factors and personal vulnerabilities.

## Hosting families under stress

6.25 Across Australia witnesses submitted evidence to the Inquiry about young people couch-surfing. In some instances, this amounted to squeezing into shared accommodation with other young people or staying in households where the presence or absence of parental adults was uncertain,<sup>39</sup> but in many cases the hosts were clearly identified as the parents of friends or sympathetic adults who were known and trusted by the young person, but were not playing a formal fostering role.<sup>40</sup> The term couch-surfing can therefore tend to disguise the serious and generous nature of the care being supplied.

6.26 The Inquiry was told about qualitative research suggesting that families accommodating young people informally offer support that mirrors the comprehensive support they provide for their own children:

*Daily tending activities included cooking, washing, and ironing. Accommodating families not only provided daily tending, they did so with an understanding of the broader benefit for the young person. ... Accommodating families provided a range of incidental activity such as transport, taking young people on outings and to extended family activities, and buying birthday and Christmas gifts. These activities enable the young person to participate in 'normal' everyday family activity and ritual.<sup>41</sup>*

The research suggests that hosting a young person can become a considerable financial strain. As an example, one family in the study waited eleven months after contacting Centrelink before the young person finally received a benefit.

6.27 A worker in Wagga Wagga told a similar story:

*It's like having a foster child with you, but you're not getting access to financial assistance ... it works okay, if you're in cooperation with their parents and their parents can help foot the bill for some of the food ...<sup>42</sup>*

6.28 While some young people only stayed briefly with friends' families or trusted adults, the Inquiry heard about living arrangements that were sustained over lengthy periods of time:

*... one of my son's friends came to stay because he and his parents weren't getting along. After nine months of staying with us he was eventually reconciled with his parents because they had an opportunity to break.*

*... Access to supports, would have been especially useful ... I ended up taking on a second part-time job while studying full-time in order to meet the added costs of another mouth to feed.<sup>43</sup>*

6.29 Witnesses provided evidence that families hosting young people feel a clear sense of moral obligation to try and help:

*... I've taken in other young people who are friends with my children, because there was just nowhere for them to go. They were experiencing family problems and they weren't welcome at home. They had nowhere else to go. They didn't want to go the refuge, so we put an offer out and I actually took care of three at different times of my daughters' lives throughout high school.<sup>44</sup>*

6.30 Witnesses submitted evidence that hosting families sometimes contact services for support:

We have also had a number of parents ring us who have taken on the role of looking after one of their children's friends. Often the young person who is the visitor is quite capable, wants to continue school but for various reasons cannot stay at home ...<sup>45</sup>

6.31 There doesn't yet seem to be a widespread dialogue at a sector level about hosting families and the support they might need. However, innovative work on this issue has been done in Queensland by workers associated with the Queensland Youth Housing Coalition (see Rachel Uhr's report *Couch-surfing in the Burbs*). A representative from Shelter SA advised the Inquiry that in spite of working in her job for two years, she could only remember the issue being raised by a sector worker on one occasion.

## **Broader family under stress**

6.32 Many young people begin their life out of home by staying with members of their broader family.<sup>46</sup> In some cases the move is connected to protective services' involvement, but young people also live with their kin informally without the state playing any part in the arrangement. In this chapter the Inquiry looks at the evidence in relation to the informal arrangements made by young people and their families.

6.33 Some young people move in with extended family after a stay in a homelessness service. The Inquiry heard from Campbell Page, which runs a number of youth services in the Eurobodalla Shire in NSW that young Indigenous people in its area tend to move relatively quickly from crisis housing into extended family.<sup>47</sup>

6.34 The broader family usually has a stronger sense of pre-existing connection with a young family member in need than non-kin. However, the broader family is still likely to experience all of the difficulties experienced by non-kin hosts in terms of the financial and emotional burden of support.

6.35 The broader family can also face problems related to age and stage in life issues. Sometimes it is grandparents who are looking after young people. While there has been some recent work on parenting grandparents that acknowledges the very serious difficulties faced by older family members taking on the care of grandchild, the intersection with youth homelessness has not been the focus of the work.<sup>48</sup> Nevertheless, much of the material about the stress on grandparent carers aligns with the extended family material presented to the Inquiry. The report *Grandparents Raising Grandchildren* and the recent snapshot *Grandparents Raising Their Grandchildren* identify financial resources, legal matters, parenting, social supports and health and wellbeing as issues for these older carers.<sup>49</sup>

6.36 One young woman wrote to the Inquiry about the reasons she left home and how she feels about living with her grandmother:

*Mum has bipolar and totally has hated me since I was 3 and my sister was born and my dad is a violent alcoholic and I don't have friends that will let me stay with them. I now live with Nan, but it's like a prison.*<sup>50</sup>

While this young woman clearly finds living with her grandmother very difficult, it's likely that her grandmother is also struggling with the chaos within the lives of the generation below her and with the challenge of having to fill the parenting gap.

6.37 Another group within the broader family that can face problems in relation to age and stage is siblings.<sup>51</sup> The evidence about siblings hosting or caring for siblings was provided by young people and services and suggested that these arrangements were often short term and problematic. One young refugee wrote to the Inquiry about the breakdown of his living arrangements:

*... when I arrived in Australia I start to live with my sister with some family friends. After sometime I couldn't stay there as there was no enough place to stay and the people start hate me. I couldn't even agree with my sister. The time that I stay there I began sleeping on the floor so I had to wait until everyone leave the salon and watching TV. In the morning I had to wake up before everyone whether I have things to do or not because I been sleeping in salon.*<sup>52</sup>

6.38 In addition to grandparents and siblings, the Inquiry also heard that other members of the extended family are providing care.<sup>53</sup> While the age and stage of life problems of siblings and grandparents may not be shared by aunts, uncles and parental generation cousins, the financial, legal, parenting, social and health and wellbeing stresses are. Additionally aunts, uncles and parental generation cousins are more likely to have children of their own and therefore, along with some Indigenous families, be susceptible to overcrowding.

6.39 Extended family members who are willing to offer a home to homeless or at-risk young family members are not currently well supported. This is especially the case when care arrangements are informal and age, stage of life and overcrowding are factors. The Inquiry heard that there is recognition in the homelessness sector of the need to work with extended family:

*... as a sector, one thing I would like to see us doing more - and it's a big problem - is about training and resourcing and skilling your staff, is to somehow engage the community, the natural supports of young people, you know, aunts and uncles, who they might be able to stay with, even if it's not working too well.*<sup>54</sup>

## Young families under stress

6.40 Several services drew the Inquiry's attention to an increase in the number of young families they see.<sup>55</sup> Some of these families are single-parent families, a proportion of which have separated into homelessness.<sup>56</sup> Many are young women who are pregnant and homeless.<sup>57</sup> Some are young fathers alone with their children.<sup>58</sup> Some are young couples with children.<sup>59</sup>

6.41 The Inquiry was advised that many of the homeless young women who are pregnant and parenting are homeless as a result of domestic violence and sexual assault.<sup>60</sup>

6.42 The homelessness of young parents is the direct cause of the homelessness of their dependent children; the at-risk status of young parents causes the same in their dependent children. In addition to the immediate problems faced by young families and their children, the Inquiry heard that children of homeless families are themselves at risk of repeat homelessness when they grow up.<sup>61</sup>

6.43 The ACT Council of Social Service spoke about the need for resources for preventative work with children in the refuge population:

*What I was seeing in refuges in Canberra is third and fourth generation SAAP clients, and it was really alarming to walk out to an 18 year-old with her six-week old baby and say how is this for you being in a refuge, and having her say, "Oh, it's great. ... I remember being here as a kid. It's the best time in my life," ... Her mother had been there and her mother's mother had been there. So the baby was fourth generation of one refuge in Canberra, and it was seen as normal.*<sup>62</sup>

*This is one group of young people where intensive support on an around-the-clock basis is clearly important. Corroboration for this observation can be found in two senate reports Forgotten Australians: A report on Australians who experienced out of home care as children (August 2004) and Protecting vulnerable children: a national challenge, the second report from the inquiry (August 2004).*

6.44 Barnardos Australia advised the Inquiry that it is seeing very young families who struggle to stay together:

*... because of inability to pay for housing. Young parents at 16, 17 and 18 have enormous difficulties affording housing and in addition they need substantial mentoring and support in the parenting role.*<sup>63</sup>

The Inquiry heard that young people accessing services are sometimes required to break up their family unit. Shelter SA gave an example:

*... we recently had a call from a couple who were seeking emergency accommodation. They were 15 years old and pregnant. They had been offered emergency accommodation but it required them to be separated and they didn't want that. Yet, that was the only facility available to youth.*<sup>64</sup>

*Melbourne Youth Support Service advised the Inquiry that young couples are not recognised in the welfare sector, in spite of the reality that they can be engaged in supportive long-term relationships.*<sup>65</sup>

6.45 A number of witnesses gave evidence about children coming to the attention of protective services and being removed from young homeless and at-risk families.<sup>66</sup> While it's impossible to comment on the appropriateness of such interventions, many young people experience them as discriminatory and persecutory.<sup>67</sup> One young mother told the Inquiry:



*... I went to hospital to give birth, after I gave birth to my daughter, the Department of Child Safety ... they did a drug test on me daughter, which I wasn't too happy about, because they did that behind my back - nice of them to tell me. Nothing come up there. They tried to get me for two sleeping pills, but I got prescribed them to take before I had to give birth. And then, I moved into a mother and babies home, that the Department of Child Safety put me in ... I did the whole three-month parenting program, and then they take me daughter off me. [She broke down crying here.] They take her off me for no reason at all. I'd done nothing wrong. I want her back ...*<sup>68</sup>

6.46 In Darwin, Health Connections for Youth gave evidence that a lack of positive parental role modelling makes parenting very difficult for some young homeless families:

*... a lot of these young people need -- they have often grown up in families where they haven't been parented or come from care systems, or just dysfunctional family environments. That is something that really impacts on their ability to provide parenting to their little babies.*<sup>69</sup>

6.47 A recent report, Opportunity for Change, on homelessness and young mothers, suggests that becoming a parent can be a positive, life-changing experience.<sup>70</sup> While young mothers reported life becoming harder, motherhood was seen to add meaning to existence and provided an incentive for reducing or eliminating harmful behaviour. Areas where young mothers were particularly vulnerable included a susceptibility to depression, partner violence and social isolation. Young mothers also experienced delays in educational and employment opportunities, faced poverty and found services for adult women difficult to relate to. The findings of the report are consistent with the evidence presented to the Inquiry.

6.48 Kardinia Women's Service Network (Victoria) spoke to the Inquiry of the extreme stigma attached to being adolescent and pregnant and the savage impact the public's behaviour has on young women's self-esteem. One worker recounted regular instances of shocking public abuse, including young women being told they are disgusting.<sup>71</sup> This added pressure was applied at a time when the young women and the workers were attempting to concentrate on nutrition, shopping and budgeting in order to prepare for life with a baby:

*And, people are judging them every step that they take, and that is something like that is just ongoing. It is very hard to address it there and then, because you don't want anything to, you know, happen, but you need to talk about it with the young person. But, [talk] doesn't stop that stigma. That stigma is just there and to be told that you're disgusting ... I mean some young women are not pregnant through choice, they are pregnant through sexual assault, and so that then starts to roller coaster emotions. I have been with young women who are in a supermarket, and they just break down crying because they are sick of the looks, they are sick of everything. You know, the baby might be crying and people are looking at them and judging them for that baby crying.*<sup>72</sup>

6.49 In Hobart, a teacher working in alternative education talked about young pregnant women being viewed as singles:



*... young women are pregnant but they are not given any other consideration until some time after the child is born, because they're not considered as having a dependent until after they give birth to the child, but that means for the entire period of the pregnancy, they can be quite severely homeless sleeping in streets or in cars or whatever and that has a major impact on their health and for them and the child. ... So there's a huge stress placed on young women in that situation and often the young fathers, too, who want to be involved in parenting. They are equally stressed trying to provide for a child and have no secure accommodation.*<sup>73</sup>

6.50 The pressures on young homeless and at-risk families are immense and so are the pressures on their children. The Inquiry heard that the effects of homelessness on children are significant:

*The trauma and stress of homelessness affects children in different ways and their vulnerability is also influenced by their stage of development. Children experience a number of negative educational, social and health consequences as a result of homelessness. Children experiencing homelessness often display behavioural problems such as aggression or withdrawal, and may experience other psychological problems such as depression and low self-esteem. Young parents in homeless families are also at risk of depression, anxiety, and other challenges to their own psychological development and coping skills, that may in turn impact on their ability to care adequately for their children.*<sup>74</sup>

6.51 The evidence in relation to service responses to young families is examined in Chapters 13 Early Intervention and 17 Health.

## Conclusions

6.52 The role of family in the lives of homeless and at-risk young people is complex and involves a number of different levels of family, including young people's family of origin, the families of their friends, their broader family and the families they create for themselves. These various levels of family can frequently experience stress and crisis, but they also provide temporal and spatial opportunities for early interventions that can prevent homelessness or ameliorate the suffering it causes.

### Recommendation 6.1

**The NYC Inquiry recommends that the Commonwealth Government progressively expand the HOME Advice program as a preventive response for families at-risk of becoming homeless to at least \$60 million per year.**

6.53 The needs of young families is evident in the homelessness statistics and some agencies have responded with specific responses for young mothers or young parents with children. Being homeless with young children raises the risk of protective services interventions. Young couples are often not able to be accommodated together in a refuge or an accommodation service. Apart from women's services able to provide a response for women with children where domestic violence is a major issue, the capacity of generalist youth SAAP services to provide the full range of support for young families is limited.

## Recommendation 6.2

**The NYC Inquiry recommends that the needs of young families who are homeless be addressed within the youth homelessness service system by providing services designed to support this group and/or specialist support workers who can work with pregnant mothers, young families with young children and children.**

## ENDNOTES

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# 7

Homelessness is the most extreme form of poverty. In turn, living in poverty is one of the structural factors that leads to becoming homeless. While there has been a debate about how to measure poverty, the general consensus is that some 10 per cent of the population live in poverty relative to the rest of the community and the costs and living standards of Australia. In this category are Indigenous people, many single parents, and people who are long-term unemployed.



## Chapter 7 | Poverty

*Poverty is hunger. Poverty is lack of shelter. Poverty is being sick and not being able to see a doctor. Poverty is not having access to school and not knowing how to read. Poverty is not having a job, is fear for the future, living one day at a time. Poverty is losing a child to illness brought about by unclean water. Poverty is powerlessness, lack of representation and freedom.<sup>1</sup>*

### Introduction

7.1 A common idea of poverty is simply having no money. However, poverty is more than this. To be homeless is to be in poverty. A lack of shelter, or insecure shelter, is clearly an element of what it means to be poor. Many homeless young people also lack access to adequate health care, drop out of school and are unemployed. Homeless young people also have a sense of powerlessness and live from day to day.

7.2 Poverty is also a cause of homelessness. Having little or no income places pressures on family life that often lead to the types of crises discussed in the previous chapter, Chapter 6 Families in Crisis. Young people living independently with little or no income find it difficult if not impossible to maintain private rental accommodation and are all too often evicted or leave voluntarily prior to being evicted.

7.3 This chapter considers what constitutes poverty in an affluent nation, who is living in poverty and poverty as a cause of youth homelessness. Finally, the consequences of poverty for housing, education, health and other matters are considered in relation to young people.

### What is poverty?

7.4 Poverty is having no or little income but it is more than that. A report on behalf of The Smith Family considered that:

*Typically poverty is regarded as a state of deprivation, a situation where one's standard of living has fallen below some acceptable minimum level.<sup>2</sup>*

7.5 The idea of deprivation as poverty is generally accepted and can incorporate factors such as lack of shelter, hunger, poor education, and poor health. Factors such as powerlessness and lack of freedom are also factors of poverty but are less generally accepted.

7.6 While there is general agreement on what constitutes poverty, there is little agreement on how to measure it. Measures of poverty are usually simplified to an income level below which it is not possible to purchase the bare necessities of life. In poor, developing nations poverty is often considered to be those living on one US dollar per day or less.<sup>3</sup> This is sometimes termed 'absolute poverty'.

7.7 The measures used by rich nations, such as Australia, are usually relative measures of poverty that focus on a level of income below which it is not possible to purchase the goods and services that are generally accepted to be necessary for living. This establishes a level of income (often weekly) called the 'poverty line' where those whose income is below the line are considered to be in poverty.

7.8 A common measure of the poverty line in Australia is the Henderson Poverty Line, which establishes income levels for different types of households. The use of this measure resulted from the 1973 Commonwealth Commission of Inquiry into Poverty and has the advantage of being the only poverty line figure updated every three months. As at March 2007, the Henderson Poverty Line was \$285.55 per week for a single person not in the workforce and \$661.45 per week for a couple with two children.<sup>4</sup>

7.9 Other poverty lines include those based on a percentage of mean or median income. For example, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) used fifty percent of median income<sup>5</sup> while the National Centre for Social and Economic Modelling (NATSEM), University of Canberra, used fifty percent of mean income.<sup>6</sup> The higher the mean or median income, the higher the poverty line. These measures have the advantage of allowing international comparisons of poverty.

7.10 The poverty rate, sometimes referred to as the 'headcount', is the proportion of the population with an income level below the poverty line<sup>7</sup> (however calculated). The poverty rate does not consider how far below the poverty line the income of an individual or household is. So those households one dollar below the weekly poverty line are included in the measure in the same way as those one hundred dollars below.

7.11 The poverty gap indicates the total monetary gap between actual household income and the poverty line for all those who are below it. This shows the total amount of money needed to be distributed to those in poverty to bring their income up to the poverty line.<sup>8</sup> It measures the depth of poverty as well as establishing a cost to relieve poverty.

7.12 Measuring poverty, and consequently who is living in poverty, is often mired in controversy. It is possible to get a sense of the scale of the problem by looking at the different estimates of the poverty rate based on different poverty line measures and to consider who is living in poverty. However, from the perspective of this Inquiry the issue of how poverty is measured is less important than the effects of poverty on families and young people and the relationship between poverty and homelessness.



## Australians living in poverty

7.13 The Australian Senate Community Affairs References Committee Inquiry into Poverty reported a range of estimates of the proportion of the Australian population living in poverty: from 5 per cent to 22 per cent.<sup>9</sup> Most estimates put the proportion at around 10 per cent. For example, NATSEM estimated the poverty rate to be around 11 per cent.<sup>10</sup> The Australian Council of Social Service arrived at a similar figure when they estimated that there are around two million Australians living in poverty (approx. 10%).<sup>11</sup>

7.14 NATSEM, in a report for The Smith Family, showed that through the 1990s there was a small increase in the proportion of Australians living below the poverty line.<sup>12</sup> This occurred despite there being substantial economic growth in this period.

### *Young people and income*

7.15 NATSEM, in their report on poverty in the twenty-first century (based on ABS data from 2001), found a high rate of poverty amongst young people aged 15 to 24 years at 17.4 per cent.<sup>13</sup> This figure may be an over-estimate as it does not account for support provided to 'non-dependent' young people by their parents, such as assistance with housing costs (especially those still living at home), education costs, medical bills etc. However, the high rate of poverty among young people was a result of high rates of unemployment, working in lower paid jobs, spending time in education and training and the maximum rate of Youth Allowance being lower than the poverty line.<sup>14</sup>

7.16 Low youth wages, relatively high youth unemployment and the minimal income support provided to young people, whether unemployed or studying, all contribute to youth poverty. These issues are considered in more detail in Chapter 8 Labour Market Marginalisation and Chapter 19 Income Support, particularly in relation to homeless young people.

### *Communities*

7.17 It is of no surprise that people living in poverty tend to be concentrated in particular communities. Research by Professor Tony Vinson has found that:

*... just 1.7 percent of postcodes and communities across Australia account for more than seven times their share of top rank positions of the major factors that cause intergenerational poverty...*<sup>15</sup>

These factors include low income, early school leaving, physical and mental disabilities and long-term unemployment.

### *Indigenous people*

7.18 Unsurprisingly, research into poverty amongst Indigenous Australians has found that it is "deep and entrenched"<sup>16</sup>. The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission estimated that around 30 per cent of Indigenous households are in income poverty.<sup>17</sup> However, the experiences of the Indigenous peoples of Australia are so different from that of other Australians that:

*... conventional income-based measures may misrepresent the nature and extent of poverty amongst them.*<sup>18</sup>

7.19 The Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research, Australian National University, suggested that the difference in experiences of poverty between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians arise from the relatively high proportion of Indigenous people living in rural and remote communities compared to non-Indigenous people. There are also cultural differences and income based measures are based on cultural assumptions.<sup>19</sup> The idea of 'family' as an economic unit would be part of this cultural difference

### *Sole parent families*

7.20 The Senate Community Affairs References Committee inquiry into poverty found that sole parent families face the highest risk of poverty of all family types.<sup>20</sup> This is despite the poverty rate for sole parent families declining from 28 per cent in 1990 to 21.8 per cent in 2000.<sup>21</sup>

### *Unemployed*

7.21 Peter Saunders, Social Policy Research Centre, University of NSW, highlighted the relationship between unemployment, underemployment and poverty. His discussion paper concluded, while there was not a perfect correlation, that:

*... unemployment continues to be a major cause of poverty in Australia and that employment only provides an escape when it comes in the form of a full-time job.*<sup>22</sup>

7.22 The labour market issues of unemployment, under-employment and job insecurity are discussed in the following chapter, Chapter 8 Labour Market Marginalisation.

### *Working poor*

7.23 While the majority of people living in poverty rely on government benefits (Youth Allowance, aged pension, Newstart etc), a significant proportion, 15 per cent, rely on wages and salaries as their main source of income.<sup>23</sup> This group of people has come to be known as the 'working poor'. It has been argued that the number of working poor is growing in Australia due to the increase in the number of part-time and/or casual employment.<sup>24</sup> Independent young people, on youth wages and in part-time, casual employment are a component of the working poor.

## **Family poverty as a cause of youth homelessness**

7.24 The Burdekin Report highlighted the correlation between family poverty and youth homelessness stating that:

*Evidence presented to the Inquiry indicates that many young people who now find themselves homeless come from a background of increasing poverty.*<sup>25</sup>

7.25 The Burdekin Report quoted a submission from Barnardos Australia highlighting the causal relationship between family poverty and youth homelessness:

*Poverty is highly correlated with social isolation, alcoholism, drug abuse and domestic violence. Where these factors are present there is a greater incentive for a young person to leave home and subsequently be at risk of homelessness.*

*The poor are likely to have inadequate housing which may increase the stress on a young person to leave home. Overcrowding is perhaps the most significant factor, however geographic factors such as the under-servicing of public housing in Sydney's West and substandard accommodation are also factors.*

*The extra pressure of supporting a young adult is felt disproportionately by the poor.*<sup>26</sup>

7.26 Similarly, the National Youth Commission Inquiry heard that family poverty was an underlying cause of youth homelessness. While crises occur in every family and are the main trigger for young people to leave home there was often a background of poverty and marginalisation in the family of the young people who are homeless. For example, the Barnardos Australia submission to the Inquiry included the following:

*Barnardos sees the problems of youth homelessness predominantly arising from pressures affecting famil[ies] living in poverty and ongoing disadvantage. These same issues also lead to neglect of younger children. Many of the policies and practices which should be assisting these families are not working well.*<sup>27</sup>

7.27 The St Vincent de Paul Society concurred stating that:

*... so many homeless youth come from very low income households where a single parent, grandparent, other relative or even friends, do not have the ability to provide adequate, even if minimal, help.*<sup>28</sup>

7.28 The Illawarra Legal Centre suggested that:

*The impact of poverty on family breakdown and the havoc on children and young people's lives cannot be underestimated.*<sup>29</sup>

7.29 The Inquiry was told that the impact of the ongoing drought in much of Australia has had a significant impact on farmers' incomes, which has placed significant pressure on family life. This has resulted in more young people moving to towns. For example, in Wagga Wagga the Inquiry was told that:

*... since the drought, the farmers and the young people on farms are suffering a lot more, in terms of we are receiving a lot more referrals for young people who are wanting to come into the civic centre, as opposed to staying out on the farms...*<sup>30</sup>

## Consequences of poverty

7.30 Poverty is not just about low income but impacts on a range of factors. Poor housing, lack of education and skills, poor health and food insecurity are all factors that coexist with or are caused by poverty. These factors are also evident amongst the homeless population.

### *Housing stress*

7.31 Related to poverty and low income is the idea of housing stress. Households in housing stress are defined as those that:

- are in the bottom 40 per cent of the household income distribution; and
- have a housing cost (rent or mortgage payment) that is 30 per cent or more of disposable income.<sup>31</sup>

7.32 The Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute estimated that in 2002-03 there were around 860,000 low-income Australian households in housing stress (or approximately 28 per cent of low income households).<sup>32</sup> The majority of these households (460,000) were in private rental properties. It is likely that, with the recent increases in interest rates, the number of mortgagee households in housing stress is rising. Further, the recent increases in rents may have placed more households in the private rental market in housing stress.

7.33 Evidence presented to the Inquiry suggested a link between housing stress and homelessness. The Youth Affairs Council of South Australia told the Inquiry that:

*... reduction in housing affordability, including the reduction in public, and more broadly, social housing stock, is the single most significant factor contributing to the increasing problem of homelessness.*<sup>33</sup>

7.34 The St Vincent de Paul Society was more specific and identified:

*... private rental increases as a key factor on youth homelessness. Young people are experiencing forced evictions and a failure to locate other suitable housing.*<sup>34</sup>

7.35 Housing stress is certainly a risk factor for youth homelessness. The Chair of the Youth Accommodation Association (NSW), told the Inquiry that SAAP services were seeing significant numbers of clients because of housing affordability issues.<sup>35</sup>

### *Education*

7.36 Professor Tony Vinson told a Poverty Week Forum at the University of Sydney in 2004 that:

*Few things are as strongly connected with social disadvantage and poverty as limited or deficient schooling. So much so that it matters little how you retrace the lives of the poor - individually, or in terms of neighbourhoods of concentrated poverty, or the institutions in which we lock people up - the path almost invariably leads to an earlier unsuccessful passage through schooling.*<sup>36</sup>

7.37 Research shows that children and young people from low income, low 'socio-economic status' families do worse at school, have lower completion rates and have lower attendance in higher education than their more affluent counterparts.<sup>37</sup> The 2005 National Report on Schooling showed that estimated Year 12 completion rates are significantly lower (52%) in low socio-economic areas than in high socio-economic areas (79%).<sup>38</sup>

7.38 Homeless young people tend to have a history of poor school attendance and attainment, either prior to becoming homeless or because of homelessness. Many have been suspended or excluded from schools for behavioural or other reasons. Some just simply stop attending classes as it is too difficult to concentrate on school when issues of accommodation have priority.<sup>39</sup> This experience is not universal but seems to depend on the services and supports available both in the school and outside for a young homeless person to remain connected.

### *Health Issues*

7.39 The Australian Senate Community Affairs References Committee inquiry into poverty reported that there is a close link between health and poverty.<sup>40</sup> The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare data shows that people who live in socio-economically disadvantaged areas are more likely to assess their health as 'poor' or 'only fair' compared with those in more advantaged areas.<sup>41</sup>

7.40 The Senate Inquiry also found that:

*Poor health can in turn lead to a compounding of poverty, because illness reduces an individual's capacity to take up opportunities such as employment or training. The ill-health of children within families may also result in a cycle of poverty that is difficult to overcome. The extent to which illness may be said to cause poverty depends largely on the type of illness and the preparedness of the community to support the economic participation of people who are ill and the living costs of people who are unable to work. The onset of illness can, however, profoundly affect individuals and families and place them at high risk of poverty.*<sup>42</sup>

7.41 Evidence presented to this Inquiry indicated that homeless young people also have poor health. Mental illness and alcohol and drug use are prevalent amongst the homeless youth population (see Chapter 10 Mental Health and Chapter 11 Alcohol and other Drugs). Also, sexually transmitted diseases<sup>43</sup>, poor nutrition<sup>44</sup>, dental problems<sup>45</sup>, and tissue injuries<sup>46</sup> are common amongst homeless young people (see Chapter 17 Health).

7.42 Witnesses presented evidence that fewer GPs were bulk billing, and then if a young person does access a GP, they have difficulty paying for the prescribed medicine. Unsupported homeless young people also have difficulties accessing the emergency departments of public hospitals. After hospitalisation there is an issue about where a homeless young person goes and with whom.

### *Hunger*

7.43 Hunger is not unknown in Australia. For example, the NSW Child Health Survey in 2001 found that in NSW, 6.2 per cent of households surveyed had "run out of food and could not afford to buy more" in the last 12 months.<sup>47</sup>

7.44 As outlined in Chapter 3 Experiences of Youth Homelessness, the Inquiry was told that many homeless young people go for periods without food. For example, one young woman told the Inquiry that:

*Going hungry is definitely one of the hard parts [of being homeless].*<sup>48</sup>

7.45 Services have developed in some areas that provide meals to homeless young people. For example, Wollongong Youth Services:

*... provides basic food at the centre and may also give young people some food to take with them.*<sup>49</sup>

7.46 However, these are stop-gap measures that ameliorate a serious consequence of homelessness for young people.

## Conclusions

7.47 Poverty is both a cause and a consequence of homelessness. Family poverty places pressures on relationships and is often a background factor in family crises. Independent young people without secure income often live in poverty or close to the poverty line and for those reliant on the private rental market for accommodation are at risk of homelessness due to housing stress.

7.48 Homelessness is itself a form of poverty and has many of the characteristics of poverty as described by the World Bank. In particular, poor health and low educational attainment are likely to continue the cycle of poverty and homelessness for many young people.

7.49 Tackling poverty is one method for reducing the incidence of homelessness to a significant degree. There are no specific anti-poverty programs in Australia. Reducing poverty has relied on economic growth, employment and the social security system. The social security system for young people is considered in Chapter 19 Income Support and employment issues are considered in Chapter 20 Employment and in the following chapter.

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# 8

The Australian labour market has changed considerably over twenty years. Unemployment is at record lows, including unemployment rates for young people, although for 15-19 year-old the rate is still 12 per cent. Full-time work has remained steady, while part-time and casual jobs have increased. Many students also work. For homeless young people, taking advantage of the improved labour market is problematic. Being without stable accommodation is itself a major barrier, because a young person cannot do the normal things employees do, like wearing clean clothes and washing regularly. Transport can be a problem, while lack of skills due to early school leaving and a general unpreparedness for work are also issues. For homeless young people with high and complex needs, employment may not be the highest priority in their lives, as they deal with cycles of mental health or drug and alcohol problems. The casualisation of the workforce and the low level of youth wages mean that employment may be tenuous. Without family support, a young person can easily end up homeless again. Sustained support and stable accommodation, combined with a raft of opportunities to be prepared for employment, and opportunities for medium-term supported employment will be required to achieve better labour market outcomes for this group.



## Chapter 8 | Labour market marginalisation

*You need to be able to get the job to be able to get the affordable accommodation.  
You need somewhere to live to be able to get jobs.<sup>1</sup>*

### Introduction

8.1 The Burdekin Report found that unemployment was a cause of youth homelessness in two ways. First unemployment was a factor in family conflict and the decision to leave home. Second, unemployed young people could not afford adequate accommodation due to inadequate income.<sup>2</sup> Similarly, in 2007 young people and youth workers highlighted the difficulties that unemployed young people have in affording ever-escalating rents. If anything has changed it is that unemployment was not reported as a factor in family conflict. This could be due to the improved labour market for adults and young people alike.

8.2 Newspaper headlines have been announcing that unemployment is at its lowest level for a generation. More people than ever are employed and many young people are now looking at gaining employment without the need for post secondary education qualifications. This rosy picture masks a complex situation. Unfortunately, a significant proportion of young people are extremely disadvantaged in the current labour market. They are unemployed or employed in part-time, poorly paid and insecure jobs. Homeless young people are particularly marginalised. They face many barriers to gaining employment and difficulties in maintaining employment once they have it. Yet some homeless young people do manage to overcome these barriers and difficulties. The majority of homeless young people do see employment as a means of stabilising their lives, in particular their accommodation. This chapter highlights some of the major issues facing homeless young people in the labour market.

## Extent of labour market marginalisation

8.3 Unemployment has been falling steadily in recent times. The overall rate of unemployment in June 2007 was 4.2 per cent compared to 10.3 per cent fifteen years earlier.<sup>3</sup> Similarly, youth unemployment was substantially lower in June 2007 (an unemployment rate of 12.0 per cent for 15 to 19 year olds) than in June 1992 when the unemployment rate was 23.2 per cent.<sup>4</sup> The unemployment rate for young adults (aged 20 to 24 years) also fell from 15.4 per cent in June 1992 to 5.9 per cent in June 2007.<sup>5</sup> Despite the significant reduction in youth unemployment in recent times, the unemployment rate for 15 to 19 year olds remains significantly higher than the general rate for unemployment.<sup>6</sup>

8.4 The cause of this fall in unemployment is a much-debated topic but while it is welcome, it should be noted that the situation is more complex than the 'headline' unemployment rate would indicate. A large proportion of young people are not counted in the labour market statistics because they are not working or looking for work but are in education or training. Around 70 per cent of 15 to 19 year olds and 26 per cent of 20 to 24 year olds are full-time at school, TAFE or university.<sup>7</sup> While some will be working a large proportion are not, nor are they looking for work. Only a small proportion of teenagers but the majority of young adults are in full time work, around 16 per cent of 15 to 19 year olds and 51 per cent of 20 to 24 year olds are employed full-time.<sup>8</sup> This group is unlikely to be studying and those that are will be studying part-time.

8.5 A smaller but significant proportion of young people are not "fully engaged" in education or work. The Dusseldorp Skills Forum, using ABS data, found around 13.8 per cent of 15 to 19 year olds and 22.4 per cent of young adults (20 to 24 year olds) were not in full time work or full time study (as at May 2007).<sup>9</sup> The proportion of 15 to 19 year olds not fully engaged has been falling and is now the lowest since 1990. This group is the most marginalised in the labour market. Not working or studying on a full-time basis means that they are not gathering the skills and knowledge necessary for secure, well paid and long term employment.

8.6 The situation of Indigenous young people is worse than for non-Indigenous young people. The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (2004) told the Australian Senate Inquiry into Poverty that:

*The proportion of Indigenous teenagers (aged 15 to 19 years) not fully engaged in work or education is three times that of non-Indigenous people.*

*Approximately 70 per cent of young Indigenous adults (aged 20-24 years) are not fully engaged with work or education.*<sup>10</sup>

8.7 A lot of homeless young people will fall into this category of not being fully engaged in the labour market or education. Based on 2001 Census data, Chamberlain and MacKenzie estimated that the majority of homeless young people (in this case aged 12 to 18 years) were unemployed (approximately 58%) while only around 41 per cent were at school or TAFE.<sup>11</sup> Similar figures are not available for the 18 to 24 years age bracket but Grace, Wilson and Batterham estimated that in Australia in 2003-04, up to 64,000 people aged 18-35 are homeless and unemployed each year<sup>12</sup>, the bulk of whom would be aged 18 to 24 years.

## A changing labour market

8.8 There have been significant changes to the labour market for young people over the past fifteen years. The number of jobs has been increasing but the main growth has been in part-time work. Many teenagers and young adults are combining part-time employment with education or training. The other significant change in the labour market is the increasing proportion of jobs defined as 'casual', that is, where the work is characterised by insecurity, variable hours and lack of leave entitlements.

8.9 The total number of young people aged 15 to 24 years employed full-time has been reasonably constant over the past fifteen years (just over 1 million full-time employees in June 1992 and June 2007)<sup>13</sup>. Over the same periods there has been a significant increase in the number of young people in part-time work (growing from around 515,000 in June 1992 to 830,000 in June 2007).<sup>14</sup>

8.10 The increase in part-time work reflects, to some extent, an increase in the proportion of young people in full-time education or training over the past fifteen years. The proportion of 15 to 19 year olds in full-time education increased from 65 per cent in June 1992 to 71 per cent in June 2007 and for 20 to 24 year olds the proportion increased from 16 per cent in June 1992 to 27 per cent in June 2007.<sup>15</sup> The full-time education participation rate for all young people (15 to 24 years) grew from 40 per cent in June 1992 to 49 per cent in June 2007.

8.11 Much of the employment has also been in jobs that are 'casual' in nature, that is, they lack security and conditions such as leave entitlements. These jobs can either be full-time or part-time, but for young people the bulk are part-time. Defined as employees without leave entitlements, ABS data shows that the proportion of young employees (aged 15 to 24 years) in 'casual' employment has grown from 36 per cent to 47 per cent between August 1992 and August 2006.<sup>16</sup> The insecurity associated with these jobs places great difficulties on young people trying to secure accommodation.

8.12 From these statistics it appears that young people are increasingly combining part-time work with full-time study. However, for those outside both education and full-time work, any employment is likely to be part-time and casual in nature.

## Barriers to employment for homeless young people

8.13 Even in the current economic climate where job opportunities exist in many places, homeless young people face many barriers to gaining employment. This is related to a lack of education and training, the need to deal with other priorities, difficulties in preparing applications and receiving communication, lack of transport, limited understanding of the labour market and discrimination.

8.14 Being homeless and unemployed creates a vicious circle for young people. One young person in Brisbane told the Inquiry:

*You need to be able to get the job to be able to get the affordable accommodation. You need somewhere to live to be able to get jobs.*<sup>17</sup>

8.15 Homelessness is itself a barrier to employment for homeless young people:  
*... because it's not very good having on their resume 'no fixed address.'*<sup>18</sup>

8.16 Those without shelter, sleeping rough, are in particularly difficult situations. Being without shelter does not allow a young person to do all the normal things workers need to do to get ready for work each day. As one young person in Brisbane said: I got one job when I was on the streets and nowhere to shower. It doesn't work at all.<sup>19</sup>

8.17 For young people with many and complex needs, securing employment is not the most pressing issue. Finding accommodation, resolving child protection issues, stabilising their mental health and decreasing their drug use are more important. One youth worker presented a typical but hypothetical case study of a young mother suffering depression:

*She may have her baby removed, so because the baby is removed they lose the parenting payment which then puts them back on Newstart and are expected to look for work, whilst trying to deal with their mental health issues. They might not have stable housing, they have requirements that they need to meet through child protection....*<sup>20</sup>

8.18 Young people with complex needs take some time to stabilise and deal with a lot of other issues before employment. For example, one young woman told the Inquiry:

*I've got this job now after spending about a year just really sorting my life out. I got into a really good shelter, where there were workers that really cared about me and stick by me for a little bit. And I've been to counselling and now I've got on to anti-depressants, and they're working really well for me. I've got my own place and finally sorted my life out a little bit, cut down on drugs, quit drugs, and stopped self-harming and it's only at this point that I've actually now gone to get employment. I've been employed about a month now and it's been really good. I'm really happy the way it's worked out.*<sup>21</sup>

8.19 Homeless young people often struggle to get opportunities in the labour market because they have limited education and their literacy and numeracy skills are often very poor.<sup>22</sup> Numerous youth workers, advocates and young people told the Inquiry of the difficulties that homeless young people have in staying at school, many do not complete their school education.<sup>23</sup> This limits their options in the labour market and for further education and training. Many are unemployed and those that find employment are in low skill, low paid jobs. The following is a typical example of the evidence provided to the Inquiry concerning employment:

*... young people [are] not reaching their potential because they are not finishing senior [school] and going on to tertiary education until later. The thing is the employment options that are open to you are also limited so you've got really, really bright kids who are working ... the majority of them work at places like Hungry Jack's, Mackas, ... if they are able to find employment.*<sup>24</sup>

8.20 Homeless young people need appropriate support if they are to overcome the many difficulties that limit their ability to sustain themselves in school or post school education. The Inquiry was told:

*... what is clear from all the aspects of research is that without the support, and certain sorts of support, young people are not going to be able to maintain their involvement in education. What is equally clear is that young people want to.*<sup>25</sup>

8.21 In their submission, UnitingCare Burnside provided an example of how a lack of training and certification was limiting employment but assistance in gaining the relevant training was not forthcoming. In this case a young woman was:

*... seeking employment at a pub and was told she needed her Responsible Service of Alcohol certificate and Responsible Conduct of Gambling certificate before she could get work at that establishment. When she asked her job network provider to fund her course to obtain the qualification she was told she could only get it if she was already working in that field.*<sup>26</sup>

8.22 Many of the young people that spoke to the Inquiry did not lack aspirations for employment but lacked knowledge of how the labour market works. One young man who wanted to be a chef was asked about his plans for becoming one. He answered that he was "... just applying for every one that comes up, really".<sup>27</sup> He clearly did not understand the qualifications required for such a profession.

8.23 Homeless young people with an intellectual disability are highly unlikely to find employment without support. The Community Living Association (CLA) in Brisbane supports homeless young people with intellectual disabilities. The CLA told the Inquiry that:

*... a hundred percent of the people who come to us have been unemployed and have almost never had a job, if they have gone through the mainstream employment agency they have perhaps got a job a day, two days a week and been sacked and haven't been able to maintain it.*<sup>28</sup>

8.24 Evidence presented to the Inquiry from young people, youth and employment service workers suggests discrimination is a significant issue. Shopfront Youth Legal Centre reported that a significant number of their clients experienced discrimination due to a drug dependency or mental illness, even when they were seeking treatment or their work performance was unaffected.<sup>29</sup>

8.25 Homeless Indigenous young people also face this additional barrier of discrimination. In Townsville, the Inquiry was told by an Indigenous employment service worker that:

*... some of my clients have phone interviews and have good phone etiquette, I teach them that, but as soon as they see them, that they're Indigenous, they get a big fat "no".*<sup>30</sup>

8.26 To find employment in the 21st century, it is essential to have access to modern technology. As one employment services manager told the Inquiry in Wagga Wagga: To be competitive to get a job, you need to have a computer at home, you need to have a mobile phone, you need to have a car and you need to have a licence. And, you need to have a landline phone often, access to faxes. Very high-tech stuff, which we take for granted as part of our normal lives. These people are lucky to have a change of clothes for tomorrow.<sup>31</sup>

8.27 The Inquiry was told that lack of transport is a critical factor preventing young people from gaining employment. Shopfront Youth Legal Centre observed that in many areas the lack of a driver's licence is a huge barrier to employment.<sup>32</sup> The submission from UnitingCare Burnside stated that:

*High travel expenses and inadequate public transport can be a barrier to employment for young people in both rural and urban areas.*<sup>33</sup>

- 8.28 They highlighted the NSW regional town of Dubbo as an example:  
*Dubbo is a regional centre and young people from surrounding areas often travel to Dubbo looking for services, jobs and housing. If they secure employment or educational opportunities that are outside their local area, it can be challenging to access these opportunities. Bus services are erratic and costly. Most young people who have experienced homelessness cannot afford to buy a car. They may not be able to obtain accommodation close to their job or educational institute due to limited availability of housing options.*<sup>34</sup>

### **Barriers to staying in employment for homeless young people**

8.29 A range of youth services reported that their clients experienced significant difficulties in staying in employment, if they could get a job. Shopfront Youth Legal Centre submitted the following list of difficulties in employment experienced by homeless young people:

- the low wage received by young people under age-based awards;
- the provision of often poor working conditions;
- the insecure tenure of position;
- the lack of full-time work;
- the fact that young people are more vulnerable to health and safety problems, and to harassment.<sup>35</sup>

8.30 Home-based young people also face these problems but the consequences are much greater for homeless young people because they lack the support of parents.

#### *Low wages*

8.31 The level of youth wages in casual, unskilled work is of concern to a number of young people and youth workers. UnitingCare Burnside wrote:

*One young person highlighted that even if you found a place to shower and got a job with a uniform such as at a fast food restaurant, the low wages make it hard to find permanent accommodation as they rarely cover rent, bills and recreation costs.*<sup>36</sup>

8.32 Clearly, the youth wages are not at a level intended for young people to live independently. It is implicitly assumed that young people will be supported by their parents.

#### *Job insecurity*

8.33 Youth workers and services expressed concern that despite improvements in the labour market, most young people could not find secure employment as a lot of the new work is not the traditional full-time, permanent employment that gives security to employees. UnitingCare Burnside wrote:



*The labour market in Australia has become increasingly deregulated and the casualisation of labour has affected young people's chances of finding stable employment.*<sup>37</sup>

8.34 According to Hanover Welfare Services in Victoria:

*... it's no surprise that people from disadvantaged backgrounds, a huge number have educational levels below Year 9, have short-term precarious employment, because that's the employment that exists, and it's even for people who are much more advantaged in the labour market. Most of or a lot of new employment is short-term casualised employment.*<sup>38</sup>

8.35 A researcher from the Alcoa Research Centre for Strong Communities at Curtin University in Perth, told the Inquiry that the casualisation of the labour force was a structural barrier to secure employment. The Centre related the experience of one young person who would have preferred to have:

*... one full-time job instead of four casual part-time jobs where I'm always on-call and I can't plan to be part of a TAFE course.*<sup>39</sup>

8.36 According to Shopfront:

*The lack of enough formal modes of employment may lead young people to seek out informal, non-waged employment, 'paid' by way of goods and services exchange. Informal employment leaves young people vulnerable to exploitation and with no means of legal recourse.*<sup>40</sup>

8.37 Not all insecurity in employment can be located in structural causes but in some circumstances are related to lack social skills. One service told the Inquiry that:

*... a lot of young people that have anger management problems, so if they do get a job and their boss or their employer says 'do this', instead of them seeing that as being asked, they may actually take offence and of course then they don't have the social skills to deal with being asked to do certain things.*<sup>41</sup>

*This highlights the need for appropriate and sufficient preparation for participation in the labour force. Some young people need to how to deal with workplace interactions. Job preparation for homeless young people needs to be cognisant of the level and duration of pre-employment support that might be necessary for a sustainable employment outcome for a young person.*

### *Vulnerabilities*

8.38 Employers and colleagues are sometimes not supportive of homeless young people. One young man told the Inquiry in Darwin he was teased and bullied about being homeless at work, which forced him to resign. He said his former colleagues:

*... thought it was all a joke. They loved it. They loved ridiculing me for not having a home. They always laughed about it, coming into work the next morning, seeing me parked in the car park, sleeping in the back seat. There was no support there. They made it worse.*<sup>42</sup>

8.39 Once a homeless young person's life starts to 'get back on track' by gaining employment their peer group might become a hindrance. As one employment service worker told the Inquiry:

*... if one of them starts to do well, it doesn't suit the rest of them, because they're not available to do what they want with them, and it might be childcare, it might be going out with them, it might be staying up late. "Well, no, I've got to go to bed, because I've got a job tomorrow." "Oh, you're no fun" and so they start to be alienated, ostracised and even sabotaged, and sometimes they self-sabotage.*<sup>43</sup>

8.40 To prevent this 'sabotage' when a young person gains a job they need support to stop them "... slipping backwards, or they get into the old way of life and late nights and can't get up in the morning and don't go to work"<sup>44</sup> as one employment services worker put it. This same worker suggested that the Job Network and other employment programs adopt a mentoring role to support young people after they get a job.

## Facilitating factors for employment

8.41 Given the barriers to employment and the difficulties in sustaining employment it is surprising that some homeless young people are employed. At the Sydney hearing and in their submission, the Inquiry was told of the results of a survey of homeless young people conducted by Mission Australia.<sup>45</sup> Of the homeless young people surveyed 43 per cent indicated they had some form of employment. While the relatively small sample size means that this figure is not likely to be representative of the whole homeless youth population it is significant because it shows that some young people manage to maintain employment while homeless.

8.42 So, while most homeless young people find it very difficult to sustain employment because their accommodation is insecure and because of other factors, there are a few that manage to do it. It was suggested to the Inquiry that this was because these young people have "... higher living skills and higher social skills."<sup>46</sup>

8.43 Homeless young people need support and assistance to stabilise those aspects of their lives that limit employment opportunities. They need support to gain the skills for work and to find and keep a job.

## Conclusions

8.44 There have been improvements in the labour market. Unemployment is relatively low including youth unemployment. As a result, unemployment as a cause of homelessness is less pronounced now that it was at the time of the Burdekin Inquiry in the late 1980s. Participation in education and training has grown significantly. Despite these improvements a significant proportion of young people are not fully engaged in work or in education or training. Homeless young people are likely to be a significant group amongst those young people marginally engaged with the labour market.

8.45 Further, the bulk of the growth in employment for young people has been in part-time and casual employment, making it difficult for independent young people to sustain accommodation in the private rental market.

8.46 There are many barriers to employment for homeless young people and even those in work can find it difficult to sustain their employment without support. There are labour market programs for unemployed and homeless young people such as the Job Placement, Employment and Training (JPET) program and the Job Network. These programs and the services that assist homeless young people to find employment are discussed in Chapter 20 Employment.

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- 24 L. Thorpy, Open Doors Youth Service, Brisbane Day 6, 11-04-2007.
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# 9

Young people who have been in state care and protection are over-represented in the homeless population. In the 2006 census of homeless school students, some 15 per cent of students had been in care and protection. In Project I, about one in five of the young people entering SAAP were estimated to have been in care and protection. An RMIT study found 42 per cent of young adults and other adults in SAAP had been in care and protection. Often these young people's family situations have deteriorated well before they become teenagers. They are a particularly vulnerable group. In every hearing, the systems of care and protection in the different jurisdictions were reported as being under-resourced and under-staffed. This resulted in priority allocations that focus on younger children, creating major issues of access for older youth. In a significant number of cases, the failure of the system is a part of the problem. The Commonwealth has had little responsibility and state care systems are in crisis. The NYC has called for a Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission inquiry into care and protection in Australia, to expose the extent of the problems and provide a basis for national action. Despite some positive effort, there is an urgent need for numerous improvements, including a universal leaving care entitlement. The total investment will be considerable, but it would have a major impact on youth homelessness in the medium- to long-term future.



## Chapter 9 | State care and protection

*I was in family and children's services care from the age of two, and in full care of the Minister until the age of sixteen. When I turned sixteen, Family and Children's Services had enough of me ...<sup>1</sup>*

### Introduction

9.1 In Australia, the responsibility for child protection and the care of children unable to live with their families for reasons of abuse and neglect lies with the state and territory governments. Children who are unable to live with their families are placed in out-of-home care services of various kinds. A common form of out-of-home care is foster care where the child is placed in the care of a volunteer. Another common type of out-of-home care is residential accommodation where a small group of children or young people are placed in a property owned or rented by an agency with employees caring for the children around the clock.

9.2 Young people with a 'care background' are over-represented in the youth homeless population. The 2006 national census of homeless school students found that close to 15 per cent of homeless students may have had an experience in state care. In Project i's sample of 200 young people entering SAAP services in Melbourne about one in five had been in care and protection at some point. Chamberlain and Johnson found that 42 per cent of adults and young people in SAAP have been in state care at some stage of their lives. UnitingCare Burnside (NSW) suggested several reasons for this:

*Young people in care or those who have been in care have a heightened vulnerability to homelessness due to:*

- lack of or disrupted familial connections;*
- childhood trauma which in some cases may lead to learning disabilities and early disengagement with the education system;*

- difficulty in finding foster carers for young people, particularly those with difficult behaviours arising out of their pre-care experience;
- multiple placements resulting in a lack of community connections.<sup>2</sup>

9.3 The issue of state care and protection was raised at the hearings and in submissions to the Inquiry for two main reasons. The first was the perceived failure of the state and territory systems to adequately care for all children in need, particularly children who come to the attention of protective services aged 12 to 16 years with the result that they end up in homelessness services. The second reason was the lack of after care support services that meant young people leaving care as a young adult became homeless and reliant on supported accommodation and other services.

9.4 The issue of state care is complex because of the age and vulnerability of the children and young people involved. The State's responsibility beyond legal statutory responsibility once wardship has expired is being debated under 'leaving care'. If the state is the parent in the absence of other adult 'parental' carers, what should be done to assist a young person after the statutory period? The link between state care and homelessness was well established during the HREOC Inquiry and since. This Chapter discusses these issues as causes of youth homelessness in Australia.

## Child Protection Services and SAAP

9.5 The Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP) is Australia's primary response to homelessness (see Chapter 14). It funds accommodation and support to homeless people of all ages.

9.6 SAAP is not meant to replace any state or territory government program according to the relevant legislation. Section 10(1) of the Supported Accommodation Assistance Act (1994) (Cwth) states that:

*Except with the joint written consent of the Minister and the State Minister of each participating State, a form of agreement specified in an instrument under section 6 must provide that SAAP will not replace or duplicate a service that is already provided by, or is the responsibility of, any other government, program or organisation.*<sup>3</sup>

9.7 Further, the legislation states that the SAAP agreements between the Commonwealth and the states and territories may specify services to meet the specific needs of '... independent young people above the school leaving age for the state concerned'.<sup>4</sup>

9.8 These two sections of the Act imply that homeless young people below the school leaving age are not the responsibility of SAAP funded organisations but are responsibility of the state and territory governments' child protection authorities.

9.9 Despite this, SAAP services and others told the Inquiry that their clients include a significant number of young people who are or should be under the care and protection of the relevant state or territory authority. For a variety of reasons the out of home care system cannot support these young people and SAAP services are called upon for assistance. For example, Karinya Young Womyn's Service, a SAAP funded service in Tasmania, wrote that:



*Our service is frequently called upon to accommodate young people under guardianship orders with the Department.*<sup>5</sup>

9.10 The Executive Officer of Caretakers Cottage in Sydney, told the Inquiry that: *We have a fairly high proportion of young people who are subject to care orders, doing DoCS care. I think it is something like 27 per cent.... And, so I guess we are a crisis repository for young people who are in the DoCS system for whom our [out of] home care system can't adequately cope.*<sup>6</sup>

9.11 Child protection workers refer young people to SAAP for a variety of reasons. SAAP workers told the Inquiry that they believed difficult clients were often referred to SAAP. For example, Karinya Young Womyn's Service (Tas) told the Inquiry:

*The most common causes being difficult and challenging behaviours and the inability of Department facilities to cater for these.*<sup>7</sup>

9.12 Young people with challenging behaviours go through a lot of out-of-home care arrangements and yet SAAP services are meant to be able to manage the same young people without a mandate and without targeted resources. This is despite the fact that funding for SAAP is less than funding for out-of-home care residential services. Some informants suggested that cost savings are the driving force behind a reliance on SAAP as opposed to out-of-home care.

9.13 The Inquiry was told that the child protection systems across the country prioritise young children over adolescents to the point where they won't accept adolescents over the age of around 12 years (depending on the jurisdiction). For example, the housing manager of Barwon Youth (Victoria) told the Inquiry that:

*The emphasis on the care and protection system is very much at the under 12 age group, it's not at the post 12 age group.*<sup>8</sup>

*It is true overall that some 70 per cent of children admitted to care and protection orders were under the age of 10 years and one quarter (24%) were 10-14 years of age.*<sup>9</sup>

9.14 A similar point was raised by UnitingCare Burnside, in NSW, who wrote that:

*The Department of Community Services is stretched and unable to respond equally to the needs of both children and young people. Younger children under the age of 11 are likely to be prioritised based on their vulnerability.*<sup>10</sup>

9.15 Apart from problems of access, once in care there are issues about how adequately the systems work with challenging young people over the age of 12 years. There was evidence that the models of intervention and care are less than adequate for this adolescent group. Anglican Community Care in Mt Gambia (South Australia), has been trying to establish an appropriate service for 14 to 16 year olds to fill the service gap. They believed that the problem was one of resources and priorities for Families SA (the child protection authority):

*All unaccompanied children who present in housing crisis must be referred to Families SA but the local office is kept busy with babies and children under 14 who are at risk.*

*They do not have the resources to adequately service 14 to 16 year olds who are not under care, while those over 16 may have options such as access to the SAAP service and Centrelink support.*<sup>11</sup>

9.16 Sometimes a young person who is the victim of abuse will present to a SAAP service, which then notifies the relevant child protection authority. However, in a combined submission, the Council to Homeless Persons (Vic), the Youth Affairs Council of Victoria and Project i advised the Inquiry that they believe that the policies and procedures of child protection authorities in many cases decide not to investigate or attempt to substantiate a notification unless there is evidence of sexual or physical abuse. They wrote:

*Child Protection has been reluctant to accept notifications relating to unaccompanied young people under 16 who are at risk of harm, unless there is evidence of physical or sexual abuse. Accordingly, considerable numbers of young people between 12-15 years are reportedly screened out, the threshold for Child Protection intervention being too high and the protective concerns not considered serious enough.*<sup>12</sup>

The most recent data from the Australian Institute for Health and Welfare substantiates this claim. The AIHW report stated:

Rates of children who were the subjects of one or more substantiations of notifications received during 2006–07 generally decreased with age. In all jurisdictions, children aged under 1 year were most likely to be the subject of a substantiation and children aged 15–16 years least likely (Table 2.7). For example, children aged less than 1 year were at least 2.3 times as likely to be subject to a substantiation as 10–14 year olds. (2008, p 26)

9.17 One young woman told the Inquiry how she slipped between the child protection and SAAP systems. She wrote:

*I was 13-14 when on the streets – too young for hostels and too old for fostering I was told.*<sup>13</sup>

9.18 Over the past decade or so, child protection has become a more prominent issue and there has been wider public acknowledgement that child abuse and neglect occurs in all parts of our society. Expectations that children should be protected from abuse and neglect have risen and as a result the child protection services are receiving a larger number of notifications. Due to changes in reporting systems it is not possible to compare notifications over an extended period. However, the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare report the number of child protection notifications increased by over 33,000 from 219,384 in 2003–04 to 252,831 in 2004–05. The number of notifications in the latest report for 2006–07 was 309,517, a 56,686 increase in the most recent year for which there is data.<sup>14</sup>

9.19 As a result of this increase in notifications and increased pressure on the child protection agencies, some SAAP services believe they have become a ‘stop-gap’ child protection service because there are not enough services focused on working with adolescents. For example, Anglicare Tasmania’s Accommodation Support Service told the Inquiry that:

*Tasmania as a state is putting more and more legislative requirements on the child protection workers, non-government workers, schools, etc. There’s this swamp of referrals*

*to child and family services, and even though we are, in our case, a six-week shelter, the easy response for child and family services is: 'Well, they're with you, they're at least safe there at the moment'.<sup>15</sup>*

9.20 In the light of large increases in reports and enhanced public expectations, state and territory governments have focused their efforts on those children they perceive as the most vulnerable, children under the age of around 12 years (the specific age varies between jurisdictions). There are good reasons for focusing on the younger age groups. Early intervention and prevention, by working with young children and their families, is preferable to picking up the pieces later on during adolescence. Intensive family support is one of the models used for this group, but it is less frequently offered to older children. The AIHW data indicates that approximately two-thirds of the children receiving intensive family support were younger than ten years of age. However, the younger group should not be prioritised at the expense of the older group who may also need intensive family and other support services, particularly in the areas of appropriate mental health, alternative education and out of home care expenses. Relying on SAAP is not an adequate response especially considering that SAAP is running at capacity as it is (see Chapter 14 Supported Accommodation).

## Leaving care

9.21 Research conducted by the Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare (Vic) in 2005 showed that young people leaving care are at risk of homelessness:

*... the life outcomes for many children and young people leaving care in Australia each year are particularly poor. A significant proportion of children and young people who have left care experience homelessness, poor physical and mental health, substance abuse, very low income levels, poor employment and educational outcomes, early parenthood, involvement with the criminal justice system and prostitution.<sup>16</sup>*

9.22 When a young person has been living in care there is a clear need for support to extend beyond the period in care because these young people do not have the family supports most home-based young people receive during their transition to independence. As UnitingCare Burnside (NSW) put it:

*Young people leaving out of home care can rely on little, if any direct family support or other community networks to ease their transition to independent living.<sup>17</sup>*

9.23 Home-based young people typically rely on their families for advice and assistance (often monetary) well into adulthood. This might include simple things such as access to a free clothes washing machine and a free meal to assistance with bond and rent. In medical or other emergencies parents can be relied upon to assist.

9.24 The experiences of witnesses to the Inquiry from across Australia supported the research showing young people leaving care are at risk of homelessness. Many SAAP services told the Inquiry that significant proportions of their clients were formerly in the care system. For example, Barwon Youth (Vic) told the Inquiry that:

*... at any one time over a third of our clients would meet that profile, but I think they're taking up about two-thirds of the staff time.<sup>18</sup>*

9.25 The witnesses from out-of-home care services also recognised the problem. For example, Aurala (Queensland) confirmed that some out-of-home care clients went from the residential care setting to homelessness services such as SAAP.<sup>19</sup>

9.26 Melbourne Youth Support Service told the Inquiry that out-of-home care often referred young people to SAAP as a first option:

*In most instances when young people's care orders end they are referred to community based organisations and provided very limited follow up care. It is unreasonable to exit a young person from care to a homeless service or the SAAP system as an initial option. If leaving care placements break down there is an understanding that these young people may need to access support from community-based organisations, however, this is an unreasonable first option.*<sup>20</sup>

9.27 In Western Australia the situation seemed particularly bad because care periods last for only two years irrespective of age although they can be extended. Young people aged 15 to 18 whose care orders are not extended often end up homeless. The Salvation Army Crossroads West (Western Australia) told the Inquiry:

*We have a case of a young girl, recently 16 who was homeless who has minimal disabilities and minimal drug and alcohol [problems]. We were excluded from the exit-planning meeting, but we were told afterwards by this young woman - and we've got notes to it - she pleaded within this case conference to remain in care of the Department because she was homeless and she had no supports. Bear in mind, these children have been placed in the care of the State because they had no family supports, so the family have not been able to provide adequate care and protection for them. They do not have a backup that they can go back to. So we have young people who are 15 and 16 who have no family support networks. If they have been moved around, which often they have been moved around, they establish no support networks within the community, they establish no networks within the educational community and are often left alone to fend for themselves.*<sup>21</sup>

9.28 The Inquiry heard three main reasons why young people leaving care become homeless. These are their lack of:

- living skills;
- education and hence poor employment opportunities; and
- support as young adults.
- pre-existing mental health issues

9.29 As the Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare (Vic), put it:  
*... many young people leaving care are experiencing multiple disadvantage across a range of life domains, that significantly heightens their risk of homelessness.*<sup>22</sup>

9.30 Anglicare NT told the Inquiry that at the age young people leave care they have few living skills, which is probably a result of the lack of nurturing in the out-of-home care system.<sup>23</sup>

9.31 The CREATE Foundation (Tasmania) suggested that it was almost inevitable that young people leaving care without support end up in the homelessness system:

*... where would any one go at ages 16, 17, 18 who have had limited experience and limited opportunities to develop life skills, where do they go other than eventually on to the streets and into homelessness?*<sup>24</sup>

9.32 As was discussed in Chapter 8 Labour Market Marginalisation, young people without sufficient education or training have limited opportunities for employment. Many young people leaving care also have limited education and training. This is especially true where young people have had a large number of care placements and, as a consequence, been required to move school regularly.<sup>25</sup> Salvation Army Crossroads West (WA), told the Inquiry that:

*The majority of them [young people leaving care] do not complete their Year 10 or Year 12 education. We did know of a case where a young person had graduated with the Year 12 Certificate without being able to read and write.*<sup>26</sup>

9.33 Young people and youth workers across Australia told the Inquiry that young people leave the care system without support and accommodation. As a result these young people end up in the homelessness support system. The case of one young person from Darwin highlights this issue. This young person told the Inquiry:

*When I turned sixteen, Family and Children's Services had enough of me, and so they said, look, you're sixteen. They knew for a fact that I couldn't be independent, but they were smart enough to be able to convince the courts that I could be independent, so they said, you know, goodbye and after that I was just basically out on my bum. Nobody is going to do anything for me now.*<sup>27</sup>

9.34 The Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare (Vic) wrote that:

*In Victoria approximately one fifth of young people leaving care are doing so without any plans for their future in place, with around one third of young people case managed directly into homelessness services on leaving care.*<sup>28</sup>

9.35 However, the Inquiry was told that the situation in Victoria is changing.<sup>29</sup> The Children, Youth and Family Act 2005 now gives the Secretary of the Department of Human Services the responsibility to:

*... provide or arrange for the provision of services to assist in supporting a person under the age of 21 years to gain the capacity to make the transition to independent living where the person—*

*(i) has been in the custody or under the guardianship of the Secretary; and*

*(ii) on leaving the custody or guardianship of the Secretary is of an age to, or intends to, live independently.*<sup>30</sup>

9.36 The Victorian Government is currently developing a state-wide framework for leaving care support. The Office of Housing (Vic) told the Inquiry that the new model of support:

*... has a much stronger, developmentally based focus on preparing young people for*

*independence throughout their time in care, and providing post care support specifically targeted to strengthen their ability to live independently. New funding in all DHS regions is scheduled to be rolled out in the second half of 2007.*<sup>31</sup>

9.37 Legislation is not sufficient in itself. In NSW the Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998 (NSW) states that:

*The Minister is to provide or arrange such assistance for children of or above the age of 15 years and young persons who leave out-of-home care until they reach the age of 25 years as the Minister considers necessary having regard to their safety, welfare and well-being.*<sup>32</sup>

9.38 Despite this legislation, young people in NSW are still leaving care without adequate support or preparation.<sup>33</sup> For example, housing is not seen to be a right<sup>34</sup> and young people leaving care are not automatically placed on the public housing waiting list, meaning that they are likely to need private rental accommodation on leaving care.<sup>35</sup> Many will struggle to maintain rent payments especially if they lack secure employment.

9.39 In Western Australia, the Children and Community Services Act 2004 states that the people formerly the subject of a protection order are entitled to appropriate social services until the age of 25 years<sup>36</sup>. However, the Inquiry was told that not every young person leaving care is referred to the funded leaving care program nor is it determined on the basis of need, where those with the highest needs are given priority. According to an out-of-home care service, Salvation Army Crossroads West (WA), which young person is referred:

*... depends on the local office and it depends on the local officer. If the local office of DCP [Department of Child Protection] worker knows of our service and works with us [he or she] would be more likely to keep referring people.*<sup>37</sup>

9.40 The Tasmanian Government told the Inquiry of their Leaving Care and After Care programs for young people who are in or have recently left out of home care. The aim of these programs is to:

*... ensure a smooth transition from out of home care to independent living, thereby reducing the risk of homelessness for these young people.*<sup>38</sup>

9.41 The Tasmanian Leaving Care program includes case planning and information, while the After Care program provides assistance with educational support, financial support and other case management activities.<sup>39</sup>

9.42 In South Australia, the Minister for Youth's Youth Council told the Inquiry that there had been a renewed emphasis on improving services for young people leaving care. Specific developments include:

*Youth Support teams in the metropolitan area offer assistance with the move to independence*

*The Leaving Care Kit and accompanying procedures is nearing completion*

*The Rapid Response Commitment includes improved access to further education and housing. There is a formal agreement between Families SA and Housing SA to smooth*

*the referral and response to requests for housing assistance*

*Planned post-care support service available partly through the Youth Support teams and a centralised information and advocacy service.*<sup>40</sup>

9.43 The Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare believes that:  
*By adequately preparing young people for leaving care and supporting young people post-care, we believe we can reduce the numbers of young people experiencing homelessness upon leaving care, resulting in considerable reduction of personal trauma, as well as a significant cost saving to government.*<sup>41</sup>

9.44 The Centre has estimated the costs and benefits of an integrated approach to a leaving care support system. They estimated that without any supports a young person leaving care is likely to cost the state government \$740,000 per year in costs related to unemployment, crime, health, housing and child protection costs of the next generation. This compares to an estimated cost of \$81,000 per year for an integrated model of leaving care support.<sup>42</sup>

## Conclusions and Recommendations

9.45 At every hearing serious issues were raised about the treatment and experience of young people in state care and protection. The cases of system failure, where the problems of some young people were exacerbated through their time in state care were too numerous to be relegated to isolated instances. The Inquiry was not in a position to quantify the extent of failed outcomes for young people passing through care and protection, however, a link with homelessness has been firmly established. This Inquiry considers that the treatment of young people in state care and protection has human rights implications and should be independently examined against established human rights standards. There have been various reviews and inquiries, however governments remain sensitive to media interest, defensive about reformist criticism, generally have a minimalist approach to providing information to the public, and are apparently unable to consider radical measures for reform with sufficient resources to redress the problems in this area. An independent inquiry, supported by all Australian governments could be the watershed process to bring about much needed reform.

### Recommendation 9.1

The NYC Inquiry recommends that the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission [HREOC] consider a national inquiry into care and protection. The Inquiry should:

- review policy and practice on care and protection from a human rights perspective;
- consider new Federal-state cooperative programs and initiatives, especially early intervention and prevention in terms of family and community support;
- advise on what reforms, structures and processes are required;
- provide advice on how change might best be implemented and the scale of reforms and resources needed.



9.46 The Federal government has until recently been exempt from any major responsibility for care and protection, which has been almost solely a state and territory jurisdiction. The Australian Government's entry into Indigenous care and protection should not be restricted to Indigenous issues but embrace care and protection overall.

### **Recommendation 9.2**

**The NYC Inquiry recommends that the Federal Government become a co-partner with the states and territories in reforming Australia's care and protection sector.**

9.47 Many young people leaving care are not being given the support they need to prevent homelessness. While most of the child protection authorities are trialing new leaving care arrangements, there are still insufficient supports in place for these young people to maintain their accommodation and prevent homelessness. ; Leaving care support is not regarded as a needs-based entitlement available over an extended period of time, for all young people who leave care.

### **Recommendation 9.3**

**The NYC Inquiry recommends needs-based support for all young people leaving care. Since not all issues are present at the point of leaving statutory care, support should be accessible on a flexible basis at any time up to 24 years of age and under exceptional circumstances outside that age range.**

9.48 Young people in care frequently have a range of complex and challenging behaviours which current models of out of home care, education and mental health are ill-equipped and under-resourced to deal with. An example of one important resource for workers, families and young people involved with the care and protection system to address the mental health needs of young people in Victoria is Take Two. This is an exemplary initiative, which has been well resourced for the purposes for which the agency was created. In addition there is a need for integrated models of accommodation, education and mental health support.

### **Recommendation 9.4**

**The NYC Inquiry recommends that all jurisdictions develop identify and fund models of exemplary practice (such as Take Two) to significantly improve the capacity of the care and protection system to meet the complex needs of young people in the areas of accommodation, education and mental health.**

9.50 Despite positive work in many areas, there remain many indicators that care and protection systems are both under-resourced and suffering an acute workforce crisis. Early intervention and prevention in child protection, while laudable, is being prioritised at the expense of support for older children who are being regarded as 'less vulnerable'. In another practical sense, they often seen as too difficult to deal with and manage and a drain on limited resources. As a result of what can only be described as system neglect, these children and young people are experiencing homelessness and reliant on the SAAP system for support. This is despite legislation that is meant to give responsibility to the state and territory child protection authorities for young people under the school leaving age. Many witnesses pointed out that it was difficult to retain experienced staff in



the care and protection systems and that a lack of resources was driving many decisions at a practice level. There have been various jurisdictional reviews and reforms, but the provision of services remains uneven and problematic. Care and protection remains a politically sensitive area of policy and practice, which tends to inhibit the searching public debate required to make real headway in this area.

#### **Recommendation 9.5**

**The NYC Inquiry recommends that all jurisdictions urgently review the level of funding provided to their care and protection programs, and develop a remedial strategy for addressing the selection, training and support of staff as well as the real need for care and protection services in the community.**

9.51 The jurisdictional issue of which authority is responsible for young people under the age of 15 has been laid down in the youth protocol, however, the problems of access to Care and Protection and the way that priorities are being decided in a resource limited environment mean that there is a continuing stream of under-age young people entering SAAP because they have no immediate alternative. Community placement options such as ACP in Victoria are a part of the answer but not the whole answer. Recruiting carers remains a problem. Such arrangements seem to often work well, but are not available in every jurisdiction. Another approach might be to expand access to SAAP support for young people in Care by funding care and accommodation for this statutory group.

#### **Recommendation 9.6:**

**The NYC Inquiry recommends that community placement models, including support to families supporting ‘couch-surfers’, be nationally implemented, following a review of existing initiatives.**

9.52 Through the SAAP National Data Collection, there is comprehensive information on clients of SAAP, their needs and the outcome achieved at the point of leaving SAAP. National and state and territory reports as well as occasional topic reports are published. Agencies receive reports number and characteristics of their clients. No such detailed client information is available for Care and Protection, particularly data which identifies outcomes at the point children and young people are discharged from care.

#### **Recommendation 9.7**

**The NYC Inquiry recommends that all jurisdictions support the development of a comprehensive national data collection for young people passing through care and protection, including foster care in Australia.**

#### **Recommendation 9.8**

**The NYC Inquiry recommends that a national project be undertaken to develop a comprehensive suite of care and protection indicators, which would be publicly reported so that system and program performance can be adequately monitored.**

9.53 Fixing the adequacy of the care and protection system to meet the complex needs of young people subject to abuse and neglect and/or without an effective caregiver and to provide ongoing support to those leaving care will go some way to reducing the number of homeless young people who are either unsupported or relying on the SAAP system. It is not possible at this point to estimate the overall cost of doing this, however it is likely to be multiple times current under-expenditure.

## ENDNOTES

- 1 Young Person, Darwin Day 4, 04-04-2007.
- 2 Submission 78, UnitingCare Burnside.
- 3 Supported Accommodation Assistance Act 1994 (Cwth).
- 4 S.13(b)(iii) Supported Accommodation Assistance Act 1994 (Cwth).
- 5 Submission 32, Karinya Young Womyn's Service.
- 6 L. Mathews, Caretakers Cottage, Sydney Day 8, 16-04-2007.
- 7 Submission 32, Karinya Young Womyn's Service.
- 8 M. Douglas, Barwon Youth, Geelong Day 1, 26-03-2007.
- 9 AIHW (2007) Child Protection Australia 2005-06, Canberra: AIHW
- 10 Submission 78, UnitingCare Burnside.
- 11 Submission 3 Anglican Community Care.
- 12 Submission 85, Council to Homeless Persons with Youth Affairs Council of Victoria and Project i (Key Centre for Women's Health in Society).
- 13 NYC Youth Survey, 12.
- 14 Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) (2006) Child protection Australia 2004-05. AIHW cat. no. CWS 26, (Child Welfare Series no. 38), AIHW, Canberra.
- 15 S. Weinert, Accommodation Support Service, Anglicare Tasmania, Hobart Day 17, 03-05-2007.
- 16 Submission 64, Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare.
- 17 Submission 78, UnitingCare Burnside.
- 18 M. Douglas, Barwon Youth, Geelong Day 1, 26-03-2007.
- 19 T. Phillips, Aurala, Save the Children Fund (Queensland Branch), Brisbane Day 5, 10-04-2007.
- 20 Submission 27, Melbourne Youth Support Service.
- 21 S. Mollasi, Salvation Army Crossroads West, Perth Day 19, 07-06-2007.
- 22 Submission 64, Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare.
- 23 K. Holliday, Connect, Anglicare NT, Darwin and Palmerston, Darwin Day 4, 04-04-2007.
- 24 S. Donnet-Jones, CREATE Foundation, Hobart Day 17, 03-05-2007.
- 25 Mendes, P. & Moslehuddin, B. (2006) 'From Dependence to Interdependence: Towards Better Outcomes for Young People Leaving State Care' in Child Abuse Review, Vol 15, pp110-126.
- 26 S. Mollasi, Salvation Army Crossroads West, Perth Day 19, 07-06-2007.
- 27 Young Person, Darwin Day 4, 04-04-2007.
- 28 Submission 64, Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare.
- 29 Ibid.
- 30 Section 16(1)(g) Children, Youth and Families Act 2005 (Vic).
- 31 Submission 39, Office of Housing, Department of Human Services, Victorian Government.
- 32 Section 165 Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998 (NSW).
- 33 K. Day, Southern Youth and Family Services, Wollongong, Sydney Day 8, 16-04-2007.
- 34 Ibid.
- 35 K. Crowe, Southern Youth and Family Services, Wollongong, Sydney Day 8, 16-04-2007.
- 36 Section 98 Children and Community Services Act 2004 (WA).
- 37 S. Mollasi, Salvation Army Crossroads West, Perth Day 19, 07-06-2007.
- 38 Submission 69, Tasmanian Government.
- 39 Ibid.
- 40 Submission 57, Minister's Youth Council, Office for Youth, South Australian Government.
- 41 Submission 64, Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare.
- 42 Ibid.

# 10

Mental health issues are more prevalent among homeless young people than the broad population of young people in Australia. In some cases, mental health is implicated in a young person becoming homeless, although it may be the case that the deterioration in the mental health of other family members tips young people into homelessness. However, becoming homeless is also an unhealthy lifestyle. There is evidence that psychological and psychiatric problems may result from homelessness. When young people with mental health issues also develop substance use problems, the situation of co-morbidity (or dual diagnosis) presents major difficulties for supported accommodation services, as well as for specialist services that deal with mental health and drug and alcohol issues. Mental health is a major issue amongst chronically homeless youth with high and complex needs.



## Chapter 10 | Mental Health

*I have had suicidal thoughts before. I have had the barrel of a shotgun in my hand. I couldn't pull the trigger...*<sup>1</sup>

### Introduction

10.1 Homeless people often suffer from mental illnesses. While many young people appearing before the Inquiry were reluctant to discuss their mental health, youth workers commonly cited their clients' mental health problems as an issue they confronted on a daily basis. Mental illness is seen as a cause of homelessness. Existing mental illness can be exacerbated by homelessness and homelessness itself can be a cause of mental health problems. Mental illness often coincides with drug and alcohol abuse complicating the treatment and support of homeless young people even further.

10.2 The Burdekin Inquiry reported that the:

*... transfer of many young people with intellectual and psychiatric disabilities from institutional to community care, without adequate preparation or support, has led to many becoming dependent on refuges which are ill-equipped to meet their needs.*<sup>2</sup>

10.3 Nearly twenty years later, there continues to be inadequate support for young people with a mental illness who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. These young people are reliant on the service system to assist them to stabilise their lives but the system has many gaps, lacks coordination across sectors and does not reflect the complexity of young peoples' lives.

### Mental Health

10.4 The World Health Organisation defines mental health as:

*... a state of well-being in which every individual realizes his or her own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to her or his community.*<sup>3</sup>

10.5 The term ‘mental illness’ is commonly used to refer to range of conditions that “... affect the way a person, thinks, feels and acts.”<sup>4</sup> Mental illness can include:

*\* behaviour disorders such as attention deficit/hyperactivity disorders;*

*\* mood disorders such as depression and anxiety; and*

*\* serious psychotic disorders such as schizophrenia and bipolar disorder that are characterised by hallucinations, delusions and thought disorders, and/or behavioural disturbances.*<sup>5</sup>

10.6 Having a mental illness, commonly depression, is a risk factor for self-harm and suicide although not all young people who self-harm or contemplate suicide have a mental illness.<sup>6</sup> Self-harm refers to a range of behaviours from mild self-injury to attempted suicide but most often it involves cutting or overdosing on medication.<sup>7</sup>

10.7 According to Headspace, the National Youth Mental Health Foundation, mental illness “... is the number one health issue affecting young people in Australia today.”<sup>8</sup> Common mental illnesses among young people are depression and anxiety disorders.<sup>9</sup> Psychotic disorders are less common in the general youth population.

## Young homeless people with mental health problems

10.8 The research evidence shows that homeless young people have mental illnesses at a higher rate than the general youth population. The extent to which homeless young people suffer from mental illness varies from study to study depending on how mental illness is defined.

10.9 In a survey of published literature and unpublished data collections, Kamieniecki (2001) concluded that homeless young people in Australia have extremely high rates of ‘psychological distress’ and ‘psychiatric disorders’.<sup>10</sup>

10.10 Project i, a study of homeless young people in Melbourne, found that:

- 26 per cent of those surveyed reported a level of psychological distress indicative of a psychiatric disorder;
- 14 per cent reported clinical levels of depression;
- 12 per cent had clinical levels of anxiety; and
- 12 per cent had clinical levels of psychosis.<sup>11</sup>

10.11 Youth Homeless Outreach Team, Eastern Health Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (Melbourne), provided the Inquiry with the results of a survey of 200 clients aged 18 to 25 years conducted in 2001-2002. This survey found that 89 per cent of clients had significant mental health problems.<sup>12</sup> Young men most commonly reported paranoia, depression and anxiety while young women reported obsessive-compulsive behaviours, somatisation (i.e. physical symptoms developed through stress or emotional problems) and psychotic disorders. Over half (53%) reported they had attempted suicide at some point and nearly three-quarters (72%) had significant self-harm issues.

10.12 The Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP) data also shows

that significant numbers of young people are presenting to SAAP services with mental health problems.<sup>13</sup> The Inquiry was told that:

*... the SAAP data shows that mental health was one of the highest level of unmet needs*<sup>14</sup>

10.13 Numerous youth health workers, specialist mental health workers, youth workers and others supporting homeless young people told the Inquiry that mental health problems such as suicide ideation, self harm and depressive mood states were common characteristics of their clients. Their evidence to the Inquiry confirmed Kamieniecki's conclusion, the Project i results, the Eastern Health Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service findings and the SAAP data.

10.14 For example, St John's Youth Services, in Adelaide, told the Inquiry that mental health problems are the largest health issue homeless young people experience. They reported that around 40 per cent of their intake into SAAP accommodation had a diagnosed mental health condition.<sup>15</sup> Wollongong City Council's Youth Services estimated that approximately 60 per cent of the young people they assisted with accommodation needs had mental health issues.<sup>16</sup>

10.15 Open Doors Youth Service, a Reconnect service for gay, lesbian and transgender young people in Queensland, told the Inquiry that:

*Forty-two percent of the young people who access our services have been diagnosed with a mental health condition, and the majority of them have practised or considered self harm, have suicidal thoughts.*<sup>17</sup>

10.16 Some service providers told the Inquiry of the increasing incidence of young people presenting with serious mental health issues, particularly suicide and self-harm. For example, a Reconnect worker believed that her service had:

*... seen a real increase of young people presenting with suicide ideation, self-harm issues... [and] young people who have made serious attempts at suicide.*<sup>18</sup>

## Dual Diagnosis

10.17 Homeless young people are presenting to services with combinations of issues, commonly mental health problems in combination with alcohol and drug use. This is often termed 'dual diagnosis' or 'co-morbidity' though both these terms can include a range of conditions that exist together.

10.18 The Inquiry heard a range of estimates of the incidence of homeless young people with both mental health issues and substance use problems. Headspace, the National Youth Mental Health Foundation, wrote in their submission that:

*Dual diagnosis has been reported as prevalent in up to 50 per cent of people with mental health problems, and is particularly common among homeless young people.*<sup>19</sup>

10.19 The experiences of supported accommodation services confirm the co-incidence of mental illness and drug and alcohol use. One service estimated that:

*Approximately a third of the client group has a dual diagnosis, that is, they face a combination of mental health and drug and alcohol issues.*<sup>20</sup>

10.20 HomeGround Services, which operates Transitional Housing in Melbourne, believes that:

*There are many people in the homeless population with substance use issues and mental health problems and more than half have developed these problems after becoming homeless.<sup>21</sup>*

## **Mental Illness: A cause and consequence of homelessness**

10.21 Mental health problems are generally believed to be a cause of homelessness though this point tends to be overemphasised. Mental health issues can also be a consequence of experiencing homelessness. In a survey of service providers by Project i, mental health problems were cited one of the most important reasons for young people leaving home.<sup>22</sup> In particular, serious mental illnesses place pressures on family relationships causing conflict or an inability of parents to manage the situation with little or no support available. These factors can be the trigger for a young person to leave home.

10.22 Anglicare Tasmania spoke to the Inquiry about young people who were discharged from the psychiatric ward of a hospital where:

*... the families are under a lot of pressure already and these young people are getting discharged from hospital, and there's nowhere else for them to go, they end up back with their families. The families have very little emotional energy and the young people are beginning to take on the onset of symptoms of mental illness and in some cases too, we know, because we work with the families, [are] undiagnosed. And with the young people returning back to their families from hospital, because there's nowhere else to go, the families are breaking down, and then the young people become homeless.<sup>23</sup>*

10.23 Assistance to families with adolescents with a mental illness may assist in preventing youth homelessness.

10.24 For young people already living alone or in shared rental accommodation, it can be hard to sustain a tenancy with a serious mental illness. In a report on mental illness and homelessness, the Mental Health Coordinating Council (NSW) suggest that:

*Mental illness increases a person's vulnerability to homelessness. Its various symptoms of paranoia, anxiety, depression, delusions, hallucinations and disordered thoughts may fundamentally affect a person's organisational skills, their relationships with family, flatmates and neighbours, employment opportunities and their ability to maintain tenancy ... Mental disorders may be cyclical in nature and occur and recur with only minimal warning. Not uncommonly, symptoms return during times of increased stress or trauma and can result in individuals facing difficulty managing day-to-day needs and responding to role responsibilities, such as worker, parent or tenant.<sup>24</sup>*

10.25 Serious mental illness is generally accepted as a cause of homelessness. What is less generally accepted is that milder mental health problems are also a risk factor for homelessness. Jigsaw Young Persons Health Service told the Inquiry:

*We have tended to see homelessness as a risk just for psychotic disorders but in our*



*catchment in fact, substance use, personality disorders, depression still increases the risk of homelessness, which I guess is reasonably new.*<sup>25</sup>

10.26 The Mental Illness Fellowship (Barwon Region) in Victoria concurred telling the Inquiry that:

*... [a] feature of mental illness is that young people, not only ... those with serious mental illness, quite often experience a lack of volition and disorganisation. It is quite often the reason they become homeless.*<sup>26</sup>

10.27 The Mental Illness Fellowship also pointed out that mental health problems are a consequence of homelessness:

*There is no doubt if we consider the stress vulnerability model in terms of mental illness, then homelessness is a significant contributor.*<sup>27</sup>

10.28 Open Doors Youth Service (Qld) pointed out that the experiences of gay and lesbian young people, many of whom were medicated for mental illnesses including depression, had an impact on their mental health. Open Doors told the Inquiry that:

*... without a doubt, being discriminated against, being bullied, being put down, and experiencing violence on a daily basis, must affect your mental health. Trauma affects mental health and at the end of the day [homeless] young people are experiencing trauma on a daily basis.*<sup>28</sup>

10.29 That homelessness causes mental health problems is generally accepted. However, the degree to which homelessness causes serious mental illness is less generally believed. The Homeless Outreach Mental Health Services in Geelong (Vic) said it was an exaggeration to claim that homelessness was a cause of serious mental illness. The witness considered that homelessness could cause "... anxiety, but it's transient sort of stuff".<sup>29</sup> The witness went on to talk about the complex interactions of homelessness, drug and alcohol abuse, and pre-existing mental illness. The Inquiry was told that:

*... you will find some family history of mental illness there that indicate[s], you know, there is a primary sort of mental health condition that is exacerbated by substance use rather than caused by substance use. And then there are the destabilising influences and effects of homelessness in itself.*<sup>30</sup>

10.30 The causal relationship between homelessness and mental illness may differ depending on the nature of the mental illness. That is, the causal link for those with psychotic disorders such as schizophrenia may be different than for people living with the more common disorders such as depression and anxiety.<sup>31</sup> Clearly, the relationship between homelessness and mental illness is complex.

10.31 Catherine Robinson confirmed the complexity of the interactions between homelessness and mental illness in her research in Australia that covered people aged 14 to 63 years, the largest percentage of the group were aged 14 to 25 years.<sup>32</sup> She found that people with a mental illness experience cycles of homelessness where they move chaotically through various forms of tenuous housing and periods of living on the street.<sup>33</sup> This research points to a failure in the service systems to support homeless people with a mental illness.

## Experiences of homeless young people with mental illnesses and SAAP services

10.32 Many homeless young people with a mental illness present to Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP) services seeking assistance with accommodation and yet half of all SAAP clients with a mental illness remain homeless after their period of support with SAAP ends.<sup>34</sup> SAAP is the main support program for homeless people.

10.33 Many SAAP workers do not have the training to support clients with mental health problems. As one SAAP worker told the Inquiry:

*We don't have the capacity in our programs and we don't have the training, the medical training, the mental health training, to be able to supervise a young person and determine whether or not they are going to be safe at that level like if somebody is seriously at risk of harm.*<sup>35</sup>

10.34 Some SAAP workers told the Inquiry that the SAAP accommodation system was not suitable for young people with serious mental illnesses. As one refuge worker said:

*I think there's some young people out there that we are not addressing, they're too difficult. They don't really fit into the refuge system, and the refuge system in my opinion really isn't the best system anyhow.*<sup>36</sup>

10.35 Homeless young people with mental health problems are a significant challenge for the SAAP sector. For example, young people who self-harm are particularly difficult to maintain in a SAAP service. One SAAP worker told the Inquiry:

*About three-quarters of the young women who are accessing our service, are actively self-harming and this has huge issues for supported accommodation providers. They're really worried how they treat these people, how to support them. They're worried with the effect on other young people by their self-harming behaviour, a massive sort of issue. And, often for those behaviours, and other things, they're not seen as suitable for certain types of models of accommodation.*<sup>37</sup>

10.36 Shire Wide Youth Services in southern Sydney, told the Inquiry about one young man with a serious mental health problem that meant that:

*... his needs [were] actually too complex for us to be able to support him in our accommodation. .... he actually went into the mental health unit. They haven't identified that he has any mental health issues. They then give us a ring and say okay we're letting him out; you guys need to find him somewhere to live.*<sup>38</sup>

10.37 With no crisis accommodation options capable of accepting him and insufficient money available to place him in a caravan or other temporary abode with the support he needs it is not surprising that the service maintained only minimal contact with this client. The solution would have been to place him in:

*... some residential option that would actually be able to provide him with a level of guidance and support and some supervision. .... if I had a housing project where I was able to have 24-hour staffing, providing him with supervision and support, a little bit*

*of both, then the opportunity for these guys to be able to work with them on some of the other issues that he's presenting with and link him in with some of the other services would be great.*<sup>39</sup>

10.38 There are no easy solutions for homeless young people with mental illnesses. Providing accommodation in and of itself will not resolve their homelessness or their mental illness:

*The expectation of even offering a house to many of our young people is not an answer ... because their capacity for independent living is obviously compromised. But, sometimes you do follow that line because the unstable, or at risk, unsafe home life is the only alternative. In which case you make a call about that kind of thing. But once they are more stable in accommodation, obviously our capacity to provide health support is enhanced.*<sup>40</sup>

10.39 Clearly there is a need for SAAP agencies and mental health services to work together to stabilise a homeless young person with a mental illness in accommodation and provide appropriate health support. However, evidence provided to the Inquiry suggested that SAAP services and mental health services frequently have difficulty in providing what the young client needs. Should a SAAP agency provide accommodation while the young person waits to access the mental health service. The timeliness of the mental health treatment is an issue. Or, a young person accesses a mental health service but can't get into a SAAP service at that time. Access to SAAP is an issue.

10.40 The lack of coordination between SAAP and mental health services can exacerbate a young person's situation. For example, one young person illustrated how SAAP workers and mental health workers have different perspectives on whether a young person with a mental illness can be supported in the community. This young person told the Inquiry a harrowing tale of being bounced between the psychiatric ward of a hospital and a youth refuge:

*[The refuge workers said] look you're becoming a little bit unwell so let's call the CAT team. They called the CAT team and the CAT team would section me and I'd be in hospital for like two days and [then] the hospital said ... 'you're fine'. So then I'd call back up to go back to that place [the refuge] and they'd say yes, and then I go back there and a couple of days later they did the same thing ...*<sup>41</sup>

10.41 The following case study, presented to the Inquiry by a SAAP worker in Darwin, illustrates how the mental health system and SAAP fail to work together to support homeless young people with a mental health problem. The case is of a 17 year-old young man:

*... with a history of family violence, physical abuse, depression and other early signs of mental illness. He came to Darwin after meeting his new girlfriend over the Internet, and moved from Queensland and he was invited to stay with this young woman's family. However pretty soon after he started to live with them things broke down fairly quickly and this young man was expressing suicidal ideations, and he was a very problematic, very complex young man. We accessed the mental health services in the public system for him to be assessed and he was informed by the psychologist that his issues were*

*not mental health issues, they were environmental issues and he in fact needed to find alternative accommodation. It was the family environment that was impacting on his mental health. He was then placed in a medium-term SAAP accommodation, which proved to be inappropriate and very soon afterwards the young man attempted to suicide twice. Both suicide attempts saw the young man being taken to the Emergency Department at the Royal Darwin Hospital, and both times the young man was assessed by the on-call Registrar for three minutes each time. The first time ... the assessment was that he actually didn't mean to do it, he was really just looking for some attention and he was lonely, so subsequently he went back to his girlfriend's family's place after that attempt. After the second attempt, a similar assessment, was told that he doesn't have mental health issues, he was just a bit sad. However, the SAAP worker and myself needed to look at whether or not this accommodation was appropriate for him. We didn't really have another option because of his mental issues, the only youth refuge in Darwin, Casey House, would have been unable to take him given his mental health issues and the dynamics and how that might have affected other young people within the seven bed refuge. So, for this young man we had to really start looking at other options but the end result was that he ended up going back to Queensland to live with his father in an abusive environment.*<sup>42</sup>

10.42 In this case the mental health service at the hospital did not consider the young man's condition to be serious enough for admission to the psychiatric ward, but the SAAP service considered his condition to be too serious for him to be accommodated in the SAAP service. Unfortunately, this type of situation occurs all too often and highlights the problem of obtaining cooperation between these service systems.

10.43 On the other hand, SAAP workers also reported good coordination between SAAP and mental health services, although the system is damned by faint praise. For example, a SAAP worker in Adelaide told the Inquiry:

*I think there are really strong collaborative links, certainly within mental health. We're constantly working with mental health services, particularly around our young people so that we do have a really good collaboration going with them. We're not arguing with them and they're not arguing with us. We're very aware of what they can do and their limitations and they're quite aware of ours. And, we do that across a range of services.*<sup>43</sup>

## Conclusions

10.44 Clearly the research shows that significant numbers of homeless young people suffer from poor mental health with some suffering from serious mental illnesses. Further, significant numbers of homeless young people have mental health problems and abuse drugs and alcohol.

10.45 From the evidence presented to the Inquiry the connections between mental health services and supported accommodation need to be improved to properly assist homeless young people with mental health problems. Additional funding to support services is required to maintain young people in appropriate accommodation.

10.46 Chapter 14 Supported Accommodation discusses the major issues with the support accommodation system while Chapter 17 Health discusses the issues with the provision of health services, including mental health services, to homeless young people.

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# 11

Drug and alcohol use by Australian young people has declined in recent years. However, many service providers report that drug and alcohol use among homeless young people has increased over twenty years. The wider availability of stimulants such as ICE has meant that the type of substances being used has shifted somewhat. The origins of drug and alcohol use are diverse: sometimes it is from a permissive family situation, as self-medication of mental health conditions, or, more commonly, as a practice acquired by contact with other young people who are homeless. There are serious consequences for homeless youth with drug and alcohol use problems, such as gaining access to supported accommodation or remaining in accommodation. SAAP agencies reported difficulty obtaining timely specialist help for their clients. Continued drug use can further harm some already worsening yet important relationships in young people's lives and lead to petty crime that ultimately involves them with police and the criminal justice system.





## Chapter 11 | Alcohol and Other Drugs

*... many young people may only use intravenous drugs or illicit drugs for a couple of years, and then they get on with their life, you know. I think sometimes we think that they're going to keep going and going and going but very often they don't.<sup>1</sup>*

### Introduction

11.1 The Inquiry into Youth Homelessness sought evidence about the levels of substance use in the at-risk and homeless youth population, the nature of that use, young people's reasons for use, the problems associated with substance use, and about young people's pathways towards less problematic use. The evidence offered the Inquiry the opportunity to better understand the experiences and needs of young people, their supporter, their families, and the homelessness service sector.

### Alcohol and other drug use

11.2 Substance use plays a role in the lives of many young people in the Australian community. The 2005 Secondary Students' Alcohol and Drug Survey looked at substance use patterns of 12 to 17 year-olds. 43 per cent of those surveyed had consumed alcohol in the past month<sup>2</sup> (down from 50% in 2002<sup>3</sup>); 13 per cent had smoked tobacco in the past month<sup>4</sup> (down from 18% in 2002<sup>5</sup>); and 8 per cent had used an illicit substance in the past month<sup>6</sup> (down from 13% in 2002<sup>7</sup>). This decrease in use contrasts with much of the evidence provided to the Inquiry from services about substance use levels among young at-risk and homeless people.<sup>8</sup> However, the story of alcohol and other drug use in this vulnerable group is complex: the population is diverse, its levels of substance use vary from no use to highly problematic use, and the reasons for using also vary.<sup>9</sup>

11.3 In Canberra, Oasis Youth Residential Service offered the Inquiry an overview:

*Eleven years ago when I was a youth worker you hardly saw any young people with drug*

*and alcohol problems, and that's just increased over the years up to being very bad at the moment.*<sup>10</sup>

11.4 A team leader working in youth housing with YWCA Darwin estimated that 70 per cent of young people using her service had alcohol and other drug problems:

*So, this would not necessarily be young people that would enter into say a residential ... rehab program, but they would be young people that have significant issues in regard to that, so, they are issues that are needing to be worked on with most of the young people that enter into the program.*<sup>11</sup>

11.5 The sector's view that there are high levels of drug use among young homeless people is supported by research undertaken as part of Project i, which indicates that homeless young people "... do engage in considerably more drug use than their home-based peers". However, the picture is complex, and there are a substantial number of young people who reported no recent use.<sup>12</sup>

11.6 Young people's choice of drug was a further area of concern for the homelessness sector. While there was no evidence submitted about the popular division of drugs into soft and hard, with its accompanying inaccurate implications about levels of risk, there was a great deal of evidence submitted about use patterns<sup>13</sup> and the reality that some drugs are particularly problematic for the sector in terms of the behaviours induced.<sup>14</sup>

11.7 Directions ACT spoke to the Inquiry about crystal methamphetamine replacing heroin, when the latter was in short supply:

*There was a heroin drought about three or four years ago and many of our injecting drug users actually went on to Ice. Heroin was much easier to handle ...*<sup>15</sup>

11.8 This concern about the difficulties of working with young people using crystal methamphetamine was echoed in a number of the public hearings. At the public hearings in Sydney, Key College, Youth Off The Streets spoke about workforce issues:

*... with the new Ice epidemic you've got kids acting out, really, you know, quite badly, and it's very difficult for young and inexperienced youth workers at refuges.*<sup>16</sup>

11.9 In Perth, Next Step Youth Drug and Alcohol Services told the Inquiry:

*The primary drug that young people are coming forward with at the moment is cannabis and has been for a number of years. But, obviously, in the last year we have seen a massive spike in the use of amphetamines, so that is certainly more problematic and more difficult to treat if you like, and work with.*<sup>17</sup>

The service made the point that the young people it sees tend to use a combination of drugs.

11.10 The Young People's Health Service in Melbourne confirmed that poly drug use patterns are common:

*... [we'll ask] do they use tobacco, alcohol, cannabis, amphetamines, opiates and quite regularly we'll have young people ticking yes.*<sup>18</sup>

11.11 The Project i research on drug use in the young homeless population found that alcohol and marijuana were the most commonly used drugs in their sample with marijuana being the most frequently used.<sup>19</sup>

11.12 The Inquiry received evidence that indicated that young people themselves are concerned about their substance use, although that concern can sometimes take a while to emerge as a young person matures.<sup>20</sup>

11.13 In Brisbane, a young woman spoke of her feelings about her drug use:

*My worker down at BYS [Brisbane Youth Service], my counsellor there, is actually a drug counsellor and I'm actually going to get her to help me get off the drugs, because I don't want to use them. It's like the drugs are controlling me. It's not me controlling the drugs, the drugs are controlling me ...*<sup>21</sup>

11.14 While voicing an interest in dealing with a substance use problem sits at some distance along the continuum from successfully addressing that problem, young peoples' interest in change should be taken seriously.

## High and complex needs

11.15 Young at-risk and homeless people who use alcohol and other drugs do not necessarily have high and complex needs. However, substance use problems can be coincident with other complicating factors such as mental health problems and other social, intellectual or emotional problems.<sup>22</sup> The evidence presented to the Inquiry in relation to young people with combined substance use and mental health problems is examined in more detail in Chapter 10 Mental Health.

11.16 While witnesses gave the Inquiry examples of services persisting and succeeding in their efforts to support young people with substance use problems who have high and complex needs,<sup>23</sup> the weight of the evidence dealt with referral failures<sup>24</sup>.

11.17 Service to Youth Council (SA) advised the Inquiry about the best approach to working with young people with high and complex needs:

*... I guess a collective wisdom around this ... is an approach called Housing First approach so that if you are housing these young people with high and complex needs first, then you can start addressing some of their other issues with drug and alcohol and mental health, which they almost inevitably have, but you can't deal with those unless they are in some ways accommodated.*<sup>25</sup>

## Background issues in problematic substance use

11.18 The relationship of at-risk and homeless young people to substance abuse can be usefully looked at in terms of the narrative of young people's lives. Certainly the Inquiry heard evidence about reasons for use and possible causes that stretched back into early life<sup>26</sup> and included mental health problems<sup>27</sup>, but it also received evidence about the profound role of homelessness itself in problematic substance use.<sup>28</sup>

### *Parental alcohol and other drug use*

11.19 South Port Community Housing Group (Victoria) brought together a number of case studies to present to the Inquiry that contained a strong narrative link between parental substance abuse and homelessness. Two of the case studies involved young people who went on to develop substance use problems of their own:

*[Case 1] ... M's parents engaged in drug-taking behaviours during her formative childhood years, exposing M to a drug-permissive culture at home ...*<sup>29</sup>

*[Case 2] ... S's mother was dependant on amphetamines and other drugs during S's formative early childhood years, which would have impacted on her ability to adequately provide structure and boundaries necessary for parenting. S's father was, and still is, dependant on alcohol ...*<sup>30</sup>

In both cases parental substance abuse was only one of various factors in these young people's lives, but it was one of the strong underlying elements that contributed to them becoming homeless.

### *Pre-existing mental health problems*

11.20 The Inquiry heard from the manager of a drug and alcohol withdrawal unit in Victoria about the high correlation between drug and alcohol problems and mental health problems or trauma in young homeless people's lives.

*... it can be up to 80 percent of drug and alcohol clients have pre-existing mental health problems and we know that mental health finds a similar percentage of drug and alcohol. So, there's a massive correlation between those two factors. I guess if I was to do some research out of the unit that I run, I could probably make correlations with lots of different issues as well. ... But, trauma is certainly a common denominator for the clients that we see.*<sup>31</sup>

### *The effect of being homeless*

11.21 Recent Melbourne-based research on substance use in the general at-risk and homeless populations found that for 66 per cent of people in the sample who had substance use problems, those problems developed after becoming homeless.<sup>32</sup> Earlier work from Project i, suggests that there isn't a straightforward causal relationship, but that exposure to street-based culture and unstable housing influences use.<sup>33</sup> In their combined submission to the Inquiry, Youth Network of Tasmania, Shelter Tasmania and the Tasmania Council of Social Service cast this reality as an opportunity for early intervention:

*It is important to acknowledge that many homeless youth develop mental health and substance abuse issues after they become homeless. Therefore, the psychological, emotional, social and physical strains of becoming homeless needs to be addressed before a substance abuse or mental health issue presents.*<sup>34</sup>

11.22 Homelessness prevention and early intervention programs can therefore be seen not only in terms of the role they play in reducing and ameliorating youth homelessness, but also in terms of playing a very real role in the National Drug Strategy's stated approach of preventing anticipated harm.<sup>35</sup>

### *Distress and trauma*

11.23 One young person shared her very stark point of view about her drug use:  
*Drugs and especially glue helped me because I hate reality.*<sup>36</sup>

### *Consequences of substance use problems*

11.24 Some of the consequences of young at-risk and homeless people's substance use problems have already been glimpsed in Chapter 6 Families in Crisis and in earlier sections of this chapter. Substance use can limit young people's access to services, inhibit their ability to exercise control over their own lives and can have serious legal and health consequences.

### *Access to services and housing*

11.25 Young people with substance use problems have difficulty gaining and keeping housing and other supports.

11.26 In Perth, Next Step Youth Drug and Alcohol Services told the Inquiry about its experience of accommodation services discriminating against young people with substance abuse problems:

*We hear all the time, particularly if you say you're ringing from Next Step ... they'll say 'Sorry, we don't have beds', but then you'll speak to another service who has rung half an hour later, and they've got a young person in.*<sup>37</sup>

11.27 Also in Perth, Drug ARM WA told the Inquiry that the expectation on the part of services that young homeless people must give up drugs in order to be accommodated, when their drug use is the best, most pleasant thing in their life, is understandable but unrealistic.<sup>38</sup> The service felt that for many young people questions about substance use were unlikely to be even considered prior to them being accommodated and supported.

11.28 YWCA Darwin told a similar story, advising the Inquiry that when young people are accepted into crisis accommodation, they often have difficulty managing their substance use issues, making it difficult to achieve longer-term accommodation outcomes.<sup>39</sup>

11.29 Given that housing and support services can provide a context in which young people are able to reduce or give up problematic substance use, it is sad that substance use has a negative impact on a young person's ability to gain access to housing and support services. Substance use can actually reduce young people's ability to make use of services and potentially extend their period of homelessness.

### *Exercising control*

11.30 In terms of young people's ability to exercise control over their own lives, maintain the relationships that are important to them and achieve what they would like to achieve, substance use problems can be destructive. Young people and their supporters submitted evidence about substance use being one of a range of issues contributing to young people leaving home<sup>40</sup> and contributing to a loss of care and control over their own children.<sup>41</sup>

11.31 Project i's research suggests that personal substance use is perceived by many young people as being an important reason why they leave home prematurely. The Inquiry was told about the strain young people's substance use places on families.<sup>42</sup> This is suggestive of the need for greater support for families in relation to parenting adolescents who use alcohol and other drugs, both when that use has developed into an addiction and when it is still experimental or remains 'recreational'.

11.32 A mother spoke to the Inquiry in Townsville about her experiences in relation to having a daughter with a volatile substance addiction:

*I have a 19 year-old daughter. She was a bad paint sniffer. She was going through six to eight tins a day. I found her semiconscious behind the weir wall. ... And from that day on, I never let her sniff anywhere but where I can see it, because I couldn't stop her. I tried everything I can. I even asked Family Services, Child Safety, ... I was getting evicted over it and everything. I said 'What would you do if it was your child? Would you let her go out and sniff behind a weir wall and find her semiconscious?' People walked past her. What would you do?<sup>43</sup>*

### *Consequences for health*

11.33 The Inquiry was told about young people experiencing psychosis,<sup>44</sup> anxiety,<sup>45</sup> and depression as a result of substance use.<sup>46</sup> Alice Springs Drug and Alcohol Services Association gave an overview:

*... a lot of people who would have smoked cannabis who want to give it up or who are at that end of it, have had some sort of paranoia or probably psychosis.<sup>47</sup>*

Any assessment of the permanency and gravity of mental health and mental impairment problems is likely to require a period of abstinence. The Association told the Inquiry:

*It might be said that you know, like a person has to be off alcohol for six months or something like that before they can be diagnosed as having clinical depression. That's a big issue ... what came first, the depression or the alcohol ...<sup>48</sup>*

11.34 Witnesses also voiced their concern about the other health impacts of problematic substance use such as reduced life expectancy<sup>49</sup> and the risk of accidental injury while intoxicated.<sup>50</sup> Given that homeless young people have higher rates of injecting drug use than their home-based peers<sup>51</sup>, the risk of blood borne viruses raised by the Burdekin Report remains a pressing matter of concern.<sup>52</sup>

### *Crime*

11.35 Young homeless people with substance use problems can get caught up in crime in order to fund those addictions.<sup>53</sup> This issue is examined in Chapter 18 Crime and Legal Issues.

### **Young substance users' needs**

11.36 Young-at-risk and homeless people who use substances, even those who use them problematically, are not necessarily locked into long-term problems with addiction. The

Inquiry heard accounts of reduction in use, respite from use as well as accounts of stable abstinence from a number of witnesses across the country.<sup>54</sup> For many young people making positive changes in their substance use levels is something undertaken without specialised treatment or support and can often result from the process of time and reflection or from the incentive provided by key, emotionally supportive or emotionally significant relationships.<sup>55</sup> The reality that some at-risk and homeless people do make positive changes without specialised treatment is astounding, given the significant stresses of being in crisis and being homeless. The Inquiry also heard about young people with substance use problems in dire need of treatment, which was unavailable to them or difficult to access.<sup>56</sup> Substance use treatment options are examined in more detail in Chapter 17 Health. In this chapter, the National Youth Commission examines the evidence presented to the Inquiry about the experiences of young substance users and what their pathways reveal about their needs.

11.37 The Inquiry heard that pregnancy and parenting were other strong motivation triggers for attempts to alter substance use patterns.<sup>57</sup> South Port Community Housing Group in Victoria gave an example:

*S engaged in high and dangerous levels of drinking from a young age, and became a regular user of marijuana. She smoked marijuana on a daily basis from about the age of 16 up until her pregnancy. Since becoming pregnant and then having the baby, S has reportedly minimised her alcohol use, and reports she has significantly reduced her cannabis consumption.*<sup>58</sup>

11.38 The Western Regional Alcohol and Drug Service in Victoria told the Inquiry that typically young drug users come to a certain point, in terms of the consequences of their behaviour, when they are ready to make the decision to give rehabilitation a go:

*We always look at people as having the four Ls ... The first one is liver, that either ... physically or psychologically you're starting to be affected by the substance. The next one is lover, as your relationships start to become affected, whether it be with your friends or with your family, and that's usually when they get shunted out of home. The next one is livelihood, they are trapped in a spiral where they are on a fixed income and can't see themselves above it and their self-worth is knocked down to here. They can't see themselves as a productive working member of the community. ... and the next one is the law, where people have issues with the law ...*<sup>59</sup>

11.39 Some witnesses spoke to the Inquiry about the tendency of young people to move to a new place in order to get away from the context of their substance use environment. In Warrnambool the Inquiry heard about young people moving because of the location of a treatment facility.<sup>60</sup> In Darwin, the Drug and Alcohol Intensive Support for Youth told the Inquiry about young people moving states in an effort to escape substance related problems. The service advised the Inquiry that these well-motivated moves often leave a young person unsupported and vulnerable to continued substance use or relapse.<sup>61</sup> Ironically, staying in the same location was also presented as a potential relapse problem.<sup>62</sup>

11.40 Young people who are at-risk and homeless share with their home-based peers the need for stable living arrangements and supportive relationships with adults. The same is true of at-risk and homeless young people with substance use problems. Of necessity, drug and alcohol workers need to concern themselves with their clients' living arrangement, even when that work is outside their funding brief:

*... as a drug and alcohol worker to try and achieve drug and alcohol goals, which is my core business, and what I'm funded to do, is very difficult when there is vulnerable housing issues. I'm almost uncomfortable to have that conversation with a young person about 'Do you think you need to reduce your substance abuse?' when I know that they will be going back to the same problem situation. So you have to take a balanced approach with that. A young person might be coming to us with a goal of reducing their substance use and we need to go through that conversation realistically this time and maybe we need to be working on your housing. So, we try and not set young people up to fail.<sup>63</sup>*

11.41 The reality of the lives of a number of at-risk and homeless young people mean that stable living arrangements may need to be supported for a number of years and that significant personal relationships with adults are quite often with adults outside their families. These adults can include the parents of friends, school staff and workers in agencies. When looking at the support needs of young people with substance use problems we therefore need to look at the needs of the organisations and individuals providing help in order to facilitate continuity and longevity in these relationships.

11.42 A Victorian regional drug and alcohol service pointed out to the Inquiry that shelter alone isn't sufficient. Young people with complex problems, such as a history of drug dependence, need additional support:

*A lot of times we are setting people up for failure by expecting them to go into a transitional housing for three months and deny themselves of all the other things that they've used over a great period of time. If we send them into a property and just give them Jerry Springer, they're going to sit around and think about not using until they use.<sup>64</sup>*

11.43 At the Hobart hearing, the Salvation Army advocated more funding for specialist tenancy support workers to work with young homeless people, particularly for those with substance use problems:

*There is a general level of frustration amongst support workers, with the inadequate level of resources to providing the needs of the most disadvantaged in Society, and we feel that it's morally inexcusable not to address this issue and do something about the waste of human potential in our society.<sup>65</sup>*

## Conclusions

11.44 The evidence submitted to the Inquiry suggests that young people with substance use problems face significant difficulties accessing and using homelessness support services. The evidence also suggests that the homelessness sector frequently struggles to provide support to problem substance users, especially in terms of accommodation models and also from a case management point of view. The material



submitted to the Inquiry also demonstrates that there are no simple answers to creating a better match between young people needs and the sector's capacity to meet those needs, which is suggests that a range of options responding to local needs may be the best way forward.

11.45 What is clearer from the evidence is that workers, families and young people themselves can identify some of the factors that are likely to be useful to at-risk and homeless young people who have problems with substance use. The Inquiry believes these factors include:

- opportunities for young people to experience optimistic and supportive, long-term relationships with reliable adults;
- supported, stable long-term accommodation options;
- opportunities to make use of diverse treatment and support models;
- direct and proactive support for young people who have family members with substance use problems; and
- support for families in relation to parenting young people who use substances.

11.46 A number of specific recommendations in relation to substance use issues can be found in Part IV of the report, which deals with health service responses.

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# 12

Indigenous young people are more likely to experience homelessness than non-Indigenous youth. Although in many ways the drivers of homelessness are similar, there are some significant differences. Indigenous Australians have been described as suffering 'spiritual homelessness' which stems from dispossession and forced removal from homelands and family. A major cultural difference with the mainstream of the community and other groups is the extended family network and the obligations that belonging to such a kinship network implies. Overcrowding is common, leading to stressful conflicts. There is an increased transience as a result of moving from more remote locations to urban centres and to visit extended family members. Drug and alcohol abuse-fuelled violence on young people is a driver for both Indigenous youth homelessness and early school leaving. Indigenous young people are over-represented in the justice system and they have difficulty accessing appropriate services. Their health outcomes are poor and they experience educational and employment disadvantage. The NYC calls for explicit attention to the needs of Indigenous young people in all national initiatives directed to Indigenous communities. Indigenous youth workers and 'boarding school' settings connected to Indigenous communities are two practical measures for consideration.



## Chapter 12 | Indigenous Homelessness

### Introduction

12.1 The Inquiry has heard evidence from many parts of Australia that the homelessness among Indigenous young people is far worse in comparison to non-Indigenous young people. The current homelessness crisis amongst Indigenous young people has many of the same characteristics as those generally faced by non-Indigenous young people. Drugs and alcohol, mental illness, lack of affordable housing, issues with the care and protection, family breakdown and domestic violence are all causes of Indigenous youth homelessness as well as non-Indigenous youth homelessness. However, there are some significant differences, which this chapter briefly explores.

### Defining Indigenous Homelessness

12.2 Earlier in this report, homelessness was defined using a cultural definition based on a minimum standard of housing. Some witnesses to the Inquiry considered that this definition does not necessarily apply to Indigenous people in Australia. The context and cultural norms of Indigenous Australians requires an alternative approach to homelessness. This issue is discussed in this section.

12.3 Tangentyere Council, an Indigenous organisation representing eighteen Town Camps in Alice Springs, considered that five types of homelessness identified by the research consultants Keys Young were appropriate for Indigenous young people (at least in Central Australia)<sup>1</sup>. The five distinct types of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander homelessness identified by Keys Young, after extensive consultation with Aboriginal and

Torres Strait Islander agencies and individuals, were:

- spiritual homelessness
- overcrowding
- relocation and transient homelessness
- escaping from an unsafe or unstable home
- lack of access to any stable shelter.<sup>2</sup>

### *Spiritual homelessness*

12.4 The Keys Young report suggested that whole communities of Indigenous people suffer from spiritual homelessness. This stems from their dispossession and forced removal from their homeland or their family.<sup>3</sup> The government policies that removed children from families (the stolen generations) and the struggle for recognition of native title have clearly contributed to homelessness in Indigenous communities. Waltja Tjutanku Palyapayi Aboriginal Corporation concurred suggesting that Indigenous homelessness include:

*... anyone without family or anyone who cannot access country.*<sup>4</sup>

12.5 The Burdekin Report(1989) took into account the way in which Indigenous Australians view the concept of the extended family network:

*Aborigines have repeatedly stressed that, for them, home is wherever a family member extends sustenance, whether emotional or physical ... Moreover, the extended family network and family obligations and expectations mean that a person even temporarily living with relatives is not 'homeless' ... This system, which operates in traditionally oriented communities, in urban camps and to varying degrees in other Aboriginal modes of social organisation, is often not recognised as valid by non-Aboriginal welfare officers.*<sup>5</sup>

12.6 The 2007 NYC Inquiry heard from a range of Indigenous-specific and mainstream services, government departments, and researchers, who made it clear that recognition of the Indigenous concept of family appears to be broadly accepted. However, the extent to which it is adopted in policy and programs varies. Further, whether Indigenous young people are homeless if they are living with extended family (however defined) depends on the conditions in which they are living, as it would for non-Indigenous young people.

### *Overcrowding*

12.7 Overcrowding results from the limited options available to Indigenous people or families to secure their own housing. Indigenous people who live in a large extended family situation are usually living in housing which is inadequate to meet their needs. Overcrowding leads to a range of social, health and other problems that flow from having large numbers of people living in a single dwelling.<sup>6</sup>



12.8 A Reconnect worker, from Waltja Tjutanku Palyapayi Aboriginal Corporation, told the Inquiry that:

*There are too many people trying to live in the one house. Houses are overcrowded with old people, couples, children, grandchildren all living together.*<sup>7</sup>

12.9 The Northern Territory Department of Health and Community Services recognised that overcrowding is a form of homelessness and a serious issue in many Indigenous communities in the Northern Territory.<sup>8</sup> They wrote that people living in such housing conditions experience:

*... a lack of security, low environmental health conditions, poor mental health, poor educational and employment outcomes, substance misuse, exposure to violence, etc. Additionally, if one consistently applies a 'cultural' definition of homelessness that is based on a minimum community standard of housing (such as access to functional kitchen, toilet and private living room facilities, and a degree of privacy), it is apparent that housing conditions in many remote Indigenous communities do not meet this standard.*<sup>9</sup>

12.10 The Aboriginal and Cultural Diversity Officer, Port Adelaide-Enfield Council (SA), explained that family groups will travel to Adelaide to access services and stay with a family member resulting in overcrowding, if only on a temporary basis. She cited an example of a '... three bedroom house with between 30 to 40 people staying.'<sup>10</sup>

### *Relocation and transient homelessness*

12.11 The Keys Young report identified a number of factors leading to relocation or transient homelessness including the necessity of travelling to obtain services or the wish to relocate either back to traditional country or to larger regional centres.<sup>11</sup> A study of Indigenous mobility in two remote communities, one in the Northern Territory and the other in Queensland, reported that the study participants were highly mobile and travelled to visit one or more places for short periods of time before returning to their home community.<sup>12</sup>

12.12 The Northern Territory Department of Health and Community Services highlighted the need for policy makers to understand the diverse and complex reasons why Indigenous people from remote communities live 'rough'.<sup>13</sup>

### *Escape from an unstable or unsafe home*

12.13 The Keys Young report highlighted that Indigenous young people are often forced out of their family or home situation because they are at direct physical risk. However, this risk may be temporary, depending on the time of the week or on who happens to be staying in their home at the time.<sup>14</sup>

12.14 The manager of the Alice Springs Youth Accommodation and Support Service (NT) told the Inquiry that Indigenous young people will seek accommodation for one

night because they expect alcohol fuelled violence in the Alice Springs Town Camps.<sup>15</sup>

12.15 The extent and nature of child abuse and neglect in Aboriginal communities, documented in a recent Northern Territory report into the protection of Indigenous children<sup>16</sup>, highlights the need for sustainable solutions for young people, their families and the communities need permanent solutions.

12.16 The manager of the St Vincent de Paul Society services in Deniliquin (NSW) told the Inquiry that domestic violence in Indigenous families was a significant contributor to Indigenous youth homelessness.<sup>17</sup>

### *Lack of access to stable shelter*

12.17 The Keys Young report suggested that some Indigenous people:  
*... are living on the streets, in parks or river-beds, in fringe camps, or at railway stations because they literally have no place to go.*<sup>18</sup>

12.18 In Alice Springs, the Inquiry was told that Indigenous people often camp in the dry Todd River bed despite local by-laws banning this practice. The manager of Family and Youth Services, Tangentyere Council, told the Inquiry that the by-law was enforced by local authorities burning people's bedding after they have spent the night camping.<sup>19</sup> The same witness observed that 'there is no lawful place for homeless people to be homeless in Alice Springs'.

12.19 There are many similarities between the cultural definition of homelessness for all people and the Keys Young definition for Indigenous people. However, a national report on Indigenous Homelessness warned that:

*... while there may appear to be similarities between certain forms of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous homelessness, the causes and contexts of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's experience of homelessness are fundamentally different.*<sup>20</sup>

## **The incidence of Indigenous youth homelessness**

12.20 The incidence of Indigenous youth homelessness in remote, rural, regional and urban communities was discussed in the Burdekin Report in 1989. In terms of housing need:

*In 1987, the estimated outstanding need for housing for Aboriginal households in Australia was 16,179 houses (Aboriginal Development Commission and Department of Aboriginal Affairs, 1987, Housing Needs Survey)*

That report found that homelessness affects many Indigenous young people and it pointed to clear evidence that homelessness in urban centres was made up of a disproportionate number of Indigenous young people.<sup>21</sup>

12.21 Indigenous people comprise 17 per cent of Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP) clients<sup>22</sup> but are only around 2 per cent of the Australian population<sup>23</sup>. That is, Indigenous people are over-represented in the SAAP statistics.

12.22 Indigenous people are over-represented in other homelessness statistics. Researchers Chamberlain and MacKenzie, using 2001 Census and other data, found that 9 per cent of homeless people were Indigenous.<sup>24</sup> Homeless Indigenous people comprised 3 per cent of people staying with other households, 7 per cent of those in boarding houses, and 19 per cent of people in the primary homeless population (i.e. sleeping rough).<sup>25</sup>

12.23 Evidence to the 2007 Inquiry confirmed that Indigenous young people are over-represented in the homeless population. Mainstream (i.e. not Indigenous specific) services told the Inquiry that Indigenous young people comprise a significant proportion of their client base. For example, Brophy Family Services, Warrnambool (Vic), told the Inquiry that Indigenous young people represented between 7 per cent and 10 per cent of their client group.<sup>26</sup>

12.24 The limited research available on the extent of Indigenous homelessness supports the evidence presented to the Inquiry. Mission Australia, in their 2006 survey of Young Australians, found that 32 per cent of the homelessness young people surveyed were Indigenous Australians.<sup>27</sup> MacKenzie and Chamberlain in their report, Youth Homelessness in Australia 2006, found that one in five of the homeless school students identified in the national census of homeless school students were Indigenous.

12.25 It is clear that Indigenous young people are over-represented in the homelessness statistics. However, since many Indigenous young people particularly in northern Australia seem to be in school sporadically or not at school at all, the problems of homelessness for Indigenous young people may be much underestimated. More research is needed to accurately measure the incidence of Indigenous youth homelessness and understand the social dynamics of their homelessness experience.

## **Experiences of homelessness by Indigenous young people**

12.26 Homeless Indigenous young people face the same general problems experienced by homeless non-Indigenous young people. However, just as the incidence of homelessness amongst Indigenous young people is greater than non-Indigenous young people, homeless Indigenous young people tended to have more frequent and more intense trouble with:

- the justice system (e.g. Indigenous young people are over-represented in the juvenile justice systems);
- accessing services (e.g. there are few Indigenous specific services in some areas and mainstream services are not always appropriate for Indigenous young people);
- keeping in good health (e.g. petrol sniffing has been a significant problem in remote communities);
- educational disadvantage and unemployment (e.g. Indigenous young people are

excluded from school at greater rates and have lower school retention rates).

- unsuitable housing stock (e.g. overcrowded and poorly maintained houses).

### *The justice system*

12.27 Around 38 per cent of young people under juvenile justice supervision during 2005–06 were identified as being of Indigenous origin.<sup>28</sup> These include young people in both community and detention supervision.

12.28 The reasons for the over-representation of Indigenous young people in the juvenile justice system are many and complex. However a major contributor is that Indigenous young people come into contact with the police more often than non-Indigenous young people; they are arrested more frequently and a higher proportion of Indigenous youth are incarcerated, compared with other young people. The following case study, submitted by Shopfront Youth Legal Centre, illustrates how often some Indigenous young people have ‘run ins’ with the police. The events took place over a number of days:

12.29 Danny was 17, unemployed, and Aboriginal. He had been homeless for some time and was staying at a local youth refuge. Danny has been subjected to police searches on numerous occasions, including:

*Search 1: At 11:00pm officers of DOCS attended the Kings Cross police station expressing concern about Danny, who was then aged 15. He had been spotted in a park, “frequented and used by drug users and suppliers.” Danny was told he would be taken to the Kings Cross police station so that inquiries could be made about the whereabouts of his parents. There was nothing in the police statement of facts to indicate Danny was suspected of carrying drugs, offensive implements, or anything else. Nevertheless, Danny was physically searched and placed in the back of a caged vehicle for conveyance to the police station.*

*Search 2: At 9:50pm Danny was observed walking across the street in Kings Cross. Police kept a close eye on Danny because he was, “fiddling with his beanie”, and looking at police. He was then observed making a phone call, apparently “without being engaged in a conversation”, whilst at the same time fiddling with his beanie and hurrying past the police. Danny was stopped and searched, being described in the police statement of facts as “aggressive”.*

*Search 3: At 10:40pm, Danny was walking in Darlinghurst where he was stopped and searched because he “matched a description given over the police radio of a suspect for drug activity.” The police discovered a picnic set down Danny’s left sock: this was a fold-up set which comprised a fork, spoon and knife. Danny was homeless at the time and had been using the set for eating takeaway food. Danny had hidden the set as he had been charged with being in possession of a knife four weeks earlier. Danny was again charged with having custody of a knife in a public place. The picnic set was described in*

*the charge sheet as having a “silver coloured 2.5 inches bladed knife.”*

*Search 4: At 2:15am, Danny was walking along a street in Marrickville with a friend. There was no suggestion in the police brief that he was committing a crime, or that he was in any way disruptive or offensive. The police decided to stop and search Danny “due to the recent spate of break and enters in the Marrickville CBD that have been conducted by juveniles” (it is questionable just how police would know that “juveniles” committed the said offences). Danny was therefore going to be stopped and searched for no reason other than his age and the location in which he was walking. There is no record of what was said to the boys, however, Danny ran when approached by police.*

The police called in the dog squad to assist in the search for Danny. Danny was found later that evening by police: he explained that he had run away because he thought there were warrants out for his arrest. The police told him he was to be searched but Danny was not informed of what (if anything) he was suspected of carrying. A struggle ensued when police tried to search Danny: he was charged with offensive language, assault police, resisting arrest, and having custody of an offensive implement in a public place. The “offensive implement” was in fact a laser pointer (i.e., a device used by lecturers to highlight information to their students).<sup>29</sup>

12.30 The Indigenous young person in the above case study was stopped on five occasions within twenty-four hours. On the last occasion, Danny who had run away from the fourth attempt to search him, was apprehended. In the ensuing ‘struggle’ he was charged because of behaviour such as ‘offensive language’, ‘assault’ (he made physical contact with officers during the struggle) and finally he was charged with having an ‘offensive implement’. He was stopped and searched because it was thought he may have been involved in more serious crimes. No arrest on any of these accounts was made. In the end, he was charged with offensives related to his behaviour while being apprehended by police some time after 2.15 am. Whether this is typical cannot be judged but the case is perhaps ideal-typical in that it illustrates the kind of dynamics that can go on between police officers on the beat and Indigenous young people frequenting public spaces.

### *Accessing services*

12.31 The Inquiry heard from both mainstream services and Indigenous-specific services about current service delivery, including suggestions for extending and deepening the models on offer.

12.32 Indigenous specific services argued for services run by and for Indigenous people. As one worker told the Inquiry in Townsville:

*... they want to stay with their own Indigenous people because they have an understanding of each other.*<sup>30</sup>

12.33 On the other hand, mainstream services argued that Indigenous young people sometimes:

*... feel they have more confidentiality in a non-Indigenous service.*<sup>31</sup>

12.34 Advocates for both approaches offered anecdotal evidence for their positions.

12.35 The Aboriginal hostel system was highlighted as an Indigenous specific service delivery model suitable for some Indigenous young people that had the capacity to be extended. Youth-specific hostels focussed on 16 to 24 year olds. Recent additions to the Aboriginal Hostels stock included youth-specific hostels associated with schools for younger Indigenous people aged 14 to 16 years.<sup>32</sup>

12.36 The Inquiry heard that those mainstream services which had a track record of success in working with young Indigenous young people observed more than one of the following:

- a commitment to be inclusive/culturally sensitive<sup>33</sup>; and/or
- employed Indigenous workers<sup>34</sup>; and/or
- links with an Indigenous organisation<sup>35</sup>; and/or
- a whole family or family inclusive approach<sup>36</sup>.

12.37 It appears that all of these approaches have merit. New Indigenous specific services need to be developed and existing ones strengthened while mainstream services need to ensure they can work effectively with Indigenous young people (as well as young people from all backgrounds).

### *Keeping in good health*

12.38 Indigenous young people suffer poorer health than their non-Indigenous counterparts. They have higher rates of death, injury and disability than other young Australians, and are more likely to live with certain chronic diseases.<sup>37</sup> The use of damaging substances such as tobacco, alcohol, illicit drugs and petrol (sniffing) have all been reported as higher among Indigenous young people than non-Indigenous young people.<sup>38</sup>

12.39 Homeless Indigenous young people are likely to be in worse health than their non-homeless counterparts. Rural and remote communities have very limited access to health services and where they exist are not always able meet the needs of homeless Indigenous young people. This latter point is also true in urban areas. Alternative approaches are needed. The Western Australian Innovative Health Service for Homeless Youth (IHSHY) is particularly successful at reaching Indigenous homeless young people because of its emphasis on:

*.... mobile and outreach models of service provision and their emphasis on culturally appropriate, non-judgmental service delivery that is responsive to clients' needs and priorities.*<sup>39</sup>

### *Educational disadvantage and unemployment*

12.40 Chapter 8 Labour Market Marginalisation pointed out that a major barrier to employment for homeless young people is their lack of education including basic literacy and numeracy. For Indigenous young people the situation is particularly bad.

The retention rate to Year 12 for Indigenous young people is only 40 per cent compared to 76 per cent for non-Indigenous young people.<sup>40</sup>

12.41 Bama Ngappi Ngappi Aboriginal Corporation (QLD), believed that the high school drop out rates amongst Indigenous young people is caused by their disengagement from school at an early age:

*I find more and more of them are dropping out. They are losing that interest in school, and I think that is lost in the earlier years, not just now. It's just the results of not learning back then.*<sup>41</sup>

12.42 Lack of education and employment leads to other problems:

*If I look at the young men that we work with ... they want meaningful work. Without it, problems occur.*<sup>42</sup>

### *Unsuitable housing stock*

12.42 Earlier in this chapter overcrowding was discussed as a form of Indigenous homelessness. The other major issue with Indigenous housing is its poor state and what is available is in short supply. The Central Australian Policy Officer for NT Council of Social Service and NT Shelter told the Inquiry:

*There's massive housing disadvantage across the whole of the NT and remote community settings, particularly for indigenous families.*<sup>43</sup>

12.43 A Reconnect Worker at Waltja Tjutanku Palyapayi Aboriginal Corporation concurred and added that of the houses available:

*Most need repairs and maintenance. Major renovations are needed.*<sup>44</sup>

## **Conclusions and Recommendations**

12.44 While it might appear that Indigenous young people's homelessness is significantly different in nature to non-Indigenous young people. While there are differences, there are more similarities. However, Indigenous young people do face significantly greater personal as well as structural difficulties finding supports and pathways to a better life. This partly stems from cultural difference, but also from discrimination and the historical dispossession of land, but it mostly arises because a higher proportion of Indigenous young people:

- are living in poverty (see Chapter 7);
- are living in overcrowded and run down houses;
- have poorer health; and
- have lower educational attainment.

A long-term community development approach is required. Young people in many Indigenous communities are too often involved in unsafe behaviours and petty crime, and

exist in a situation where there is little else to do and few adults with any responsibility to supervise and assist them to participate in creative programs. The NYC proposes the development of a youth work corp in Indigenous communities. The proposed positions would meet a community need, involve education and training for selected Indigenous young men and women, and represent real jobs. These ideas were suggested by some Indigenous community members, however there should be a broader consultation prior to any decision to implement.

**Recommendation 12.1:**

**The NYC Inquiry recommends that Indigenous young peoples' needs and issues be an explicit component in all national responses for improving the social and economic conditions of Indigenous communities.**

**Recommendation 12.2:**

**The NYC Inquiry recommends that the Federal Government fund Indigenous youth workers in Indigenous communities, especially in rural and remote Australia. Funding should cover access to training and education that leads to a youth work certificate or diploma, networking and professional supervision, as well as opportunities for ongoing skills development.**

12.45 Apart from home-schooling supported by a curriculum delivered by correspondence and the School of the Air, many farming families in rural and remote areas send their children to boarding schools that are a long distance from their homes. The cost of this type of private schooling is borne by the families who have the financial means. At the same time, going elsewhere for schooling is seen as a necessity. A relatively small number of Indigenous students have received scholarships to attend these same schools. Several Indigenous communities in northern Australia have proposed an alternative model for a boarding school that is closer to where the student's families live and connected with the Indigenous communities. Their argument is that students would live-in during the week and would be able to concentrate on their studies, while at the same time being safe, secure and well fed. On weekends, they would rejoin their families in nearby communities. However, aunts and elders from the communities would be involved in the management and operations of the boarding school and have access to students during the week.

**Recommendation 12.3:**

**The NYC Inquiry recommends that the Federal government develop 'boarding school' options for Indigenous young people, located near to Indigenous communities, where this is supported and sought by the community.**

12.46 The issue of whether to have Indigenous specific services or mainstream services has generated debate at times. Both approaches can work. The adoption of one or the other model will largely depend on whether there are appropriate services available, whether the Indigenous community organisations have the capacity to extend their service provision. Lastly, it would depend on the general attitude in a particular community.



## Recommendation 12.4

**The NYC Inquiry recommends that Australian governments commit to effective consultation with Indigenous communities to determine whether services delivered into a region can be managed locally or require collaboration with an external service provider. If the second option for a service for at-risk young people and their families is chosen, a strategy for local community capacity building should be specifically part of the service model.**

12.47 These problems must be addressed before homelessness amongst Indigenous young people declines to the same levels as non-Indigenous young people. The priority in Indigenous communities is urgent practical action that respects the Indigenous people being helped and involves them centrally in the process of helping themselves and their communities. However, the myriad of specific problems faced by Indigenous young people in Australia probably need a whole other inquiry at some point to independently monitor the Commonwealth intervention commenced under the Liberal Government, but continued in a modified form by the new Labour Government, and to inform the under-developed area of Indigenous youth policy more generally.

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# 13

Schools and the education system have become important sites for early intervention to assist homeless and at-risk students. Community agencies work more closely with schools than during the early nineties, in the aftermath of the HREOC report. School welfare staff have become an important part of the early intervention response. However, school welfare resources and the school welfare staff available are unevenly distributed across Australia and the NYC seeks to establish appropriate national standards. There are still problems of school exclusion, when schools are confronted by young people displaying 'challenging behaviours' due to family problems. Where family reconciliation and mediation is undertaken, good results are possible in many cases - but not all. Reconnect is a highly successful early intervention program but not all communities have a Reconnect service and only about one third of students deemed to be most at risk, are currently being reached. Students who become homeless receive more help than in the past but remain very vulnerable to not completing school. Alternative education settings should be made available as important options for some students



## Chapter 13 | Early Intervention

*I had a few really good things happening when I was in primary school and they started falling apart for me, and if you could catch it right when that starts happening and if you can do something to keep those good things going, then it won't get as bad.<sup>1</sup>*

### Introduction

13.1 The Inquiry was presented with evidence about the role of schools in relation to youth homelessness and about programs and initiatives designed to support the educational needs of at-risk and homeless young people. Much of the evidence provided focused on programs and attitudes that have developed since the publication in 1989 of the Burdekin Report.<sup>2</sup> The Burdekin Report raised the question of ‘... whether the education authorities have a role in helping homeless or unsupported students’.<sup>3</sup> In 2007, that question seems to have been well and truly answered in the affirmative. Expectations about the role of schools as agents of support and intervention have grown, in part as a result of data on the extent of student homelessness and the subsequent debate about ‘early intervention’.<sup>4</sup>

13.2 This chapter looks at early intervention and schools by first laying out the evidence provided to the Inquiry on the general topic of the educational experiences of at-risk and homeless young people, and then it examines the current situation in schools and alternative education providers.

13.3 The other major area in which the Inquiry sought evidence about early intervention was families and what happens to families. Along with schools, families are social institutional sites where young people can either be supported in the transition to a healthy adulthood or they can be abandoned and become homeless. The Burdekin Report identified families as potential sites for external support ‘... by way of resources, respite care, counselling, or related services’.<sup>5</sup> This architecture of support remains relevant today, and much of the evidence provided about young people and their families

relates to the extent to which the nation has been able to make progress in this area of early intervention. This chapter also looks at the available early intervention support for young people and their families and for young families.

## Education

13.4 The Inquiry was told that homeless young people have lower rates of participation in education than their home-based peers<sup>6</sup> and that a lack of education has the potential to create long-term adverse outcomes.<sup>7</sup> Young people and services submitted evidence to the Inquiry about the difficulty of maintaining their education when homeless.<sup>8</sup> Some of the problems highlighted included young people:

- having nowhere to live; <sup>9</sup>
- experiencing frequent changes of address; <sup>10</sup>
- being pregnant or having children; <sup>11</sup>
- being unable to attend school regularly; <sup>12</sup>
- coming from a background of high family mobility that involved attending multiple schools; <sup>13</sup>
- lacking an income; <sup>14</sup>
- living in an unsupportive peer environment; <sup>15</sup>
- having constant appointments to keep; <sup>16</sup>
- not having access to public transport; <sup>17</sup>
- facing prohibitive course costs; <sup>18</sup>
- having no access to washing facilities; <sup>19</sup>
- having literacy and numeracy problems; <sup>20</sup>
- being poorly nourished; <sup>21</sup>
- experiencing poor general and mental health; <sup>22</sup>
- being tired; <sup>23</sup>
- lacking books, stationery, clothing and access to computers; <sup>24</sup>
- having other pressing issues to worry about; <sup>25</sup>
- having adult responsibilities to shoulder. <sup>26</sup>

13.5 One young person wrote to the Inquiry about the reality of her life:

*... I worry so much about tomorrow I have no time for today. I can't cope with work, studies and finding a place. It's really hard.*<sup>27</sup>

13.6 UnitingCare Burnside (NSW) conducted consultations with young service users in preparing its submission to the Inquiry. The results suggest that having survival issues to worry about is an experience shared by many at-risk and homeless young people:

*They talked about surviving through the day and week and felt that finding some place to stay and finding food was far more important to them than school.*<sup>28</sup>

13.7 The Australian Federation of Homelessness Organisations drew the Inquiry's attention to the difficulties that SAAP services have in attempting to improve their young client's participation in education.<sup>29</sup> SAAP data on unaccompanied children provides a worrying picture:

*... around one-third of unaccompanied 14-15 year-olds and over half of unaccompanied 16-17 year-olds who accessed SAAP were not in the education system. These proportions were relatively unchanged after support.*<sup>30</sup>

13.8 While this data highlights the high number of young homeless people who are missing out on an education, many homeless young people remain committed to acquiring an education.<sup>31</sup> In Perth, one young person talked to the Inquiry about what it was like trying to get back into school:

*... I wanted to go to school as soon as I had stable accommodation. But, I found it really, really hard. I had to go to so many organisations to try and get book grants. It was a fight.*<sup>32</sup>

*The young person recommended that any decision to return to school should be met with enthusiasm and ready access to practical support.*

13.9 The support and maintenance of education was seen as an urgent priority by Hanover Welfare Services (Vic). Hanover challenged the popular notion of housing first, suggesting that education should be an absolute priority:

*... shift the focus from homelessness and housing to education and make it the top priority. At the moment, where it's housing first, we make decisions that impact badly on their education, in an effort to get the house.*<sup>33</sup>

*Hanover advised the Inquiry that the homelessness and education sectors need to change current practices to improve educational outcomes, especially for young people in the middle years of their schooling.*<sup>34</sup>

13.10 This question about the age at which students need to be provided with early intervention support to protect their engagement in education was also a concern for the workers from Darumbal Community Youth Services (Qld), who spoke about the importance of addressing literacy and numeracy problems at the primary school level.<sup>35</sup>

*... by the time we start working with these kids in Grade 8, there's a whole lot of issues there which should have been tackled probably back in Year 5.*<sup>36</sup>

## Programs and initiatives

13.11 The NYC sought evidence about programs and initiatives designed to improve educational and social outcomes for young people. A selection rather than a fully comprehensive list is featured here, that provides a snapshot of some the current approaches.

13.12 The NSW Association for Adolescent Health identified that state's Links to Learning Community Grants as an initiative.<sup>37</sup> Originally developed between 1988 and

1994<sup>38</sup>, this suite of programs allows local councils and non-government agencies to apply for funds to deliver education and training activities to young people who are at risk of disengaging, or who have already disengaged, from education.<sup>39</sup>

13.13 A number of witnesses provided evidence about the Australian Government's Connections program, which was formerly known as POEM (Partnership Outreach Education Model).<sup>40</sup> This program stream commenced in 2002 and aims to reach 13 to 19 year-olds who are not engaged in mainstream schooling by providing an education and personal development program in a community, TAFE or school setting.<sup>41</sup> Questions have been raised about the level of funding for this program and for these students being unrealistically low.

13.14 Barwon South West Homelessness Network (Vic) drew the Inquiry's attention to the Victorian Government's Youth Employment Education and Training Initiative or YEETI<sup>42</sup>, which grew out of that government's Youth Housing Action Plan of 2004.<sup>43</sup> This program offers high-risk 15 to 25 year-olds additional financial assistance to help them with educational and employment expenses.<sup>44</sup>

13.15 In Launceston, Anglicare talked about the Start@TAFE course, which is a TAFE Tasmania initiative for 16 to 19 year-olds that started in 2003. The course is designed for early school leavers and offers mentoring and individualised programs.<sup>45</sup>

13.16 In the Northern Territory, Palmerston High School and Taminmin High School<sup>46</sup> both highlighted the Territory's School-Based Constables program. The program commenced in 1984 and involves school-based police officers teaching in selected subject areas.<sup>47</sup>

13.17 The Northern Territory Government drew attention to Families and Schools Together and MindMatters as intervention programs.<sup>48</sup> The Families and Schools Together program originated in the United States in 1988 and was piloted in Australia in 1997.<sup>49</sup> It is being implemented in primary schools and combines outreach and multi-family groups to help strengthen families and prevent educational failure and other harms. MindMatters is an Australian program funded by the Australian Government and designed to improve secondary school environments and embed prevention and early intervention activities as 'protective factors' for mental health.<sup>50</sup>

13.18 Service to Youth Council (SA) described a pilot project called Flexible Learning Options, or FLO, which is an approach to enrolment targeting at-risk or disengaged 12 to 19 year-olds. Learning can take place in the community or in a school setting and the program provides resources for case management and offers students an individualised learning program with personal support.<sup>51</sup>

13.19 The Victorian State Government's Office of Housing and BATForce in Geelong (Vic) drew the Inquiry's attention to the efficacy of the School Focused Youth Service (SFYS) in Victoria.<sup>52</sup> This program targets at-risk young people between the ages of 10 and 18 and is delivered by and through community agencies and schools. It includes access to brokerage funding for purchasing services.<sup>53</sup> SFYS is designed to provide comprehensive, integrated and school-linked welfare support and has an emphasis on coordination and partnerships between youth services and schools.<sup>54</sup>



13.20 In Hobart, The Salvation Army spoke about its Home and School Support Program, or HASS. This program is funded by The Army and targets boys between the ages of 10 and 14, with the aim of preventing homelessness and disengagement from school. The program provides a child and family worker in the home and school context.<sup>55</sup>

## Schools

13.21 Schools are logical sites for early intervention initiatives to prevent or ameliorate youth homelessness and for initiatives to support the educational needs of at-risk and homeless young people. Schools are universal institutions, engaged in long-term relationships with all young people up to some point. The Service to Youth Council (SA) wrote to the Inquiry about the opportunities that schools have to intervene early. The Council conducted research in 2005, examining the experiences of young people who had been homeless:

*... 80 per cent of young people in the survey had told someone at school when they had become homeless.*<sup>56</sup>

13.22 In Melbourne, Eastern Health CAMHS (Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service) reiterated this view:

*... long before agencies become involved, [schools] are the places that see these young people first and see the changes first.*<sup>57</sup>

13.23 The Inquiry did not hear any direct evidence disputing the proposition of an early and active role for schools in student welfare, but it did hear that 'student welfare support' is not necessarily embraced by all schools. Witnesses submitted evidence that schools vary in the quality of school leadership on student welfare issues, the local organisational cultures of different schools influence their interactions with outside agencies; schools organise their staff structures and priorities differently; and schools vary in the nature of their philosophical and practical commitment to the educational and emotional needs of homeless and at-risk students.

### *Schools and outside agencies*

13.24 Mission Australia advised that school and agency partnerships have enormous potential in relation to early intervention.<sup>58</sup> However on the ground, these partnerships are not always effective as they might otherwise be. Vinnies Services, Deniliquin (NSW) told the Inquiry that school-community agency relationships are very dependent on the attitude of individual school principals. Vinnies gave an example of two schools with which its Commonwealth-funded Reconnect early intervention service works. One school embraced the concept of having a partnership with an outside agency, provided the service with an office in the school and encouraged all school staff members to make direct referrals to Reconnect. As a consequence, the Reconnect service was able routinely to identify and engage with students in difficulty at an early stage. By contrast, the other school only ever called Reconnect during a crisis and it appeared to lack a school culture that embraced collaboration with outside agencies:

*... they would sing our praises and say what a fantastic program. If you were to contact*

*them, that would probably be the response that you received, and yet for us to receive referrals from them, it's probably a quarter to four on a Friday, and we'll get a phone call to say Joe can't go home from school today.*<sup>59</sup>

13.25 While a school's culture isn't simply a product of the principals' leadership, leadership can be a determining factor in how well a school deals with at-risk and homeless young people. Vinnies Reconnect advised the Inquiry that in order to have a more consistent approach, there needs to be policy support to encourage principals to make student 'student welfare' a practical priority in the school:

*... the Head must have a motivation to do it, and that may need to come from a more formal direction, because if there isn't the formal direction and there's no accountability for that head to be engaging with services like ourselves ...*<sup>60</sup>

### *Welfare support systems in schools*

13.26 In a nation with an education system controlled by different states and territories there is necessarily great variation in the welfare support available in schools. In some parts of Australia, the level of support staffing is relatively high; in other jurisdictions it is less comprehensive. Even when the support staff are in place in a particular state or territory system, that doesn't necessarily mean that the support system is working effectively. The Inquiry heard evidence that some welfare staff members are used inappropriately by school management.<sup>61</sup>

13.27 UnitingCare Burnside (NSW) raised concerns about the level of resources and training provided for early intervention in schools:

*Young people we interviewed stated that often they didn't find school counsellors to be helpful. They said they didn't feel the school counsellor had the relevant life experience to deal with their issues. One young person stated, "it's okay if you go to them with normal stuff. But if you go say to them - I've been raped, they don't really know what to do".*<sup>62</sup>

*Also, UnitingCare made the point that schools should not be the only site for early intervention and that they may not be able to meet the needs of young people who feel alienated from the school culture. The service believes that partnerships offer a cost-effective solution:*

*[A partnership] allows young people to form relationships with youth workers from the local council or from community service agencies outside of a casework model. Once young people have made these connections they are more likely to seek assistance from youth workers if they are experiencing conflict or other issues.*<sup>63</sup>

13.28 Centacare's Reconnect program in the ACT made the same point by emphasising the importance of youth workers who being too closely associated with the school.<sup>64</sup>

13.29 Witnesses emphasised the need for accomplished welfare support staff with some independence from school management. In Wagga Wagga, there was a recommendation for experienced social workers.<sup>65</sup> Mission Australia included youth

workers and social workers in the preferred mix.<sup>66</sup> In Darwin, the Inquiry was told that the ideal would be a two-person, male-female model.<sup>67</sup>

13.30 The Inquiry also heard that welfare support staff members need ready access to specialist services.<sup>68</sup> A youth worker from Hobart College explained that beyond having supportive leadership and adequate welfare resources, schools need to be able to rely on the existence of non-school-based, expert adolescent specific services:

*... the bottom line is that the core business of a college is to assist students to be educated. [The school provides] the best possible back-up service for that process. So the school would be really grateful if there were better drug and alcohol services so that not every single service can be delivered in the school.*<sup>69</sup>

13.31 In relation to the timing of early interventions, witnesses advised the Inquiry about the need for earlier action.<sup>70</sup> Darumbal Community Youth Services in Brisbane called for the appointment of youth support staff at the primary school level.<sup>71</sup> BATForce in Geelong (Vic) agreed, telling the Inquiry that even at Grade 3, schools know which young people likely to be at-risk later on.<sup>72</sup>

13.32 The Inquiry was interested in the views of witnesses on what constitutes good or effective early intervention in schools and what works well. Hobart College (Tas) provided an overview of its response to the needs of at-risk and homeless young people, giving an picture of teamwork and a multi-service approach. The College responded to the challenge by:

*... employing a full-time youth worker, working collaboratively with Colony 47 to support a student housing complex, providing staff Professional Learning in relation to understanding poverty and disadvantage, developing close links with Centrelink Social Workers, permitting the youth worker to be a member of the IHSY State Advisory Committee (Youth Health Fund), operating a weekly free dinner for independent students - catered by staff, providing material assistance when required by homeless students, offering flexible learning options, working together with Jobs Pathways and JPET and, more recently, Youth Pathways ...*<sup>73</sup>

13.33 At the opposite end of the country, Taminmin High School talked about working creatively with students and parents to build its capacity to support at-risk and homeless young people in a rural context where support services and infrastructure are limited or inaccessible:

*... it is not only children that present to us, like parents are coming to us with their families falling apart, and trying to actually link them in ... those services ... are often in Darwin which is 50 kilometres, and these families are not necessarily wealthy and the petrol money for example would be difficult and there is a very limited bus.*<sup>74</sup>

The school uses a planned approach to building capacity that involves the rigorous development of peer support networks with students supporting students and parents supporting parents:

*Prior to parent teacher night, the parents phone a number of parents and invite the*

*harder to reach families to come in, so it's coming from other parents and not the school. We run food, we have some incentives. ... We always offer transport as part of the thing. Sometimes people can come together. ... if it's a family in crisis, we've been known to do a home visit as well. So we do get out and go to the families if that's an absolute barrier or meet the family. We've met at the Corroboree Park Tavern, because that's where the parent felt safe in meeting.*<sup>75</sup>

Taminmin also provides professional development for teaching staff, including mental health first aid and makes use of the presence of a youth-friendly, school-based constable.

### *Schools as obstacles*

13.34 While the Inquiry was presented with evidence about schools playing a supportive and nurturing role in the lives of at-risk and homeless young people, it also heard from the homelessness sector and alternative education providers about at-risk and homeless young people being excluded from schools.<sup>76</sup> Shopfront Youth Legal Centre (NSW) advised the Inquiry that exclusions are the norm:

*By the time most of our clients come to us, they usually pretty much have left school or at least mainstream schools anyway. Usually, that is as a result of having been suspended or excluded.*<sup>77</sup>

13.35 The sector acknowledged that schools sometimes face challenging behaviours<sup>78</sup>, but there were criticisms about young people being easy targets and particular criticisms of educational departments for denying the ramifications of school exclusion and for failing to protect the educational progress of young people during their periods of exclusion.

13.36 Hanover Welfare Services (Vic) advised the Inquiry that exclusions are an open secret:

*The State Government will say that kids aren't expelled from government schools. That's rubbish. They're excluded through stealth, and because it is difficult to exclude a student, what happens is that kids, particularly kids who are difficult, when they start to disappear from school they are not followed up ...*<sup>79</sup>

13.37 Southern Youth and Family Services, Wollongong (NSW) wrote to the Inquiry about the lack of educational support once suspension has taken place:

*... there is no assistance provided by the Education Department during suspension periods.*<sup>80</sup>

This complaint was echoed by Colony 47's Youth Services Unit (Tasmania).<sup>81</sup>

13.38 The Youth Accommodation Association advised the Inquiry that this lack of support for services with clients who've been excluded from school is a widespread problem for the homelessness sector.<sup>82</sup>

13.39 Witnesses also submitted evidence suggesting that, in some locations, independent young people who want to enrol in a new school are unable to do so.

Sometimes the difficulty is related to the absence of a guardian<sup>83</sup> and sometimes it is because schools are reluctant to accept homeless and at-risk young people. Key College, an alternative school, wrote of its experience supporting young people wanting to re-enter mainstream schooling:

*Sometimes our students would like to move back to a mainstream school. It doesn't happen very often. However when a student wants to give it a "go" then the opportunity should be there for them. This is extremely difficult and becoming harder. ... Last year we rang a number of private and public schools for one particular student. No one was prepared to give this student a second chance. One school did not even bother to return our calls (6 in total). They didn't even know the background ... of the child.<sup>84</sup>*

### *Barriers to remaining at school*

13.40 As mentioned previously, there is a range of factors that can act as barriers to young people remaining in education. These factors influence young people's ability to attend mainstream schools. The Inquiry heard that attending mainstream school can be particularly difficult for young parents, who often feel judged.<sup>85</sup> Even when young parents are welcome, the availability of on-site childcare is a significant issue.<sup>86</sup>

### **Alternative education**

13.41 The Inquiry heard about a number of organisations in different parts of Australia that offer alternative educational options to homeless and at-risk young people.<sup>87</sup> Witnesses agreed that models which offered personal support to address life issues and a modular approach to learning had real advantages.

13.42 Youth in the City in Canberra gave evidence about the importance of having several workers and a module-based curriculum as part of its Youth Education Program, then went on to describe the program's atmosphere:

*... they've got someone who is interested in everything and not in a really pokey and nosey way, but is working in conjunction with that young person to make sure that they're getting the best ... and understanding of the fact that if a young person has been homeless that night, there's no way that they're going to be keen on getting straight into their maths that morning, ... they're wanting to go and have a feed, they want to get warm, you know, and perhaps be able to have a shower and do things like that, and have that flexibility.<sup>88</sup>*

13.43 Mission Australia cited their Learning Unlimited program, which operates in South Australia, as an example of best practice:

*Mission Australia, in partnership with young people, local communities, government departments and schools has developed Learning Unlimited, a cluster of services and programs for young people who have disengaged or are at risk of disengaging from their communities and their education. Off-campus programs offer accredited schooling to young people who need an alternative to mainstream school life. Delivered from*

*community setting they provide a bridge, enabling young people to complete their studies and to find a sense of purpose for the future.*<sup>89</sup>

13.44 Mission Australia also highlighted Creative Youth Initiatives, a Sydney-based learning program that it operates for young people with high and complex needs. The program provides:

*... a highly specialised and supportive learning environment for young people aged 16-24 years who are homeless or marginalised. Many of the young people who attend the six-month program have severe mental health, financial and personal health issues. The key focus is on creative learning, working with others and rebuilding their lives. Programs designed to engage them in music, photography, art and other disciplines are offered.*<sup>90</sup>

13.45 Key College, a small alternative school in Sydney, incorporates counselling into its program and claims that its educational outcomes demonstrate that in a supportive and well-designed educational environment, young homeless people can make significant educational advances. Six students completed their school certificate in English, Mathematics and computers. One student achieved 91 per cent in English, another 82 per cent and a third 75 per cent. One student in 2005 completed two HSC subjects on a part-time enrolment. In the experience of the teachers from Key College, young people, even those with high and complex needs, can achieve educationally if provided with sufficient support and in smaller-scale environment than a mainstream school.<sup>91</sup> The college advised the Inquiry that its students seek meaningful and recognisable qualifications.<sup>92</sup>

13.46 The Inquiry heard that in order to maintain their education, young homeless people often need access to alternative educational environments. A critical factor is that these alternative environments are staffed by supportive trustworthy adults and that the students are protected from ridicule and don't feel out of place.<sup>93</sup> UnitingCare Burnside gave an example that demonstrates the way a mainstream school environment can become intolerable even when the school's intention is good:

*When a school Principal bought one young person a uniform so she could replace her worn one, she said it became known around the school and other students called her a "scab".*<sup>94</sup>

13.47 Witnesses advised the Inquiry that many young people who are in need of alternative education options do not have easy and timely access to them, particularly in rural areas.<sup>95</sup> Reconnect Townsville talked about the work done locally by the Flexible Learning Centre, but pointed out that the Centre can only assist a few:

*... [it] is doing an excellent job but that's 45 kids for again a 160,000, 170,000 population. That is not much. But they are doing excellent work.*<sup>96</sup>

## **Young people and their families**

13.48 The Reconnect program dominates the area of early intervention for young people and their families. Reconnect grew out of the Youth Homelessness Pilot Program and began in 1999 as a nationwide Australian Government recurrently funded program,

designed to reduce youth homelessness. The program targets 12 to 18 year-olds and focuses on reconnecting young people to family, education, employment and the community.<sup>97</sup>

13.49 The program has fostered a change in the homelessness sector. It has provided some resources for early intervention work with families and, through its successes in working with individual young people and their families, has shifted attitudes about the best way to respond to young people during the early stages of homelessness. In Geelong, Time for Youth spoke about this shift, which saw its workers weighing up the competing imperatives of rights-based responses with reunification-focused responses. Time for Youth advised the Inquiry that in certain circumstances it gave preference to reunification efforts:

*... traditionally it's been every easy to put [15, 16 and 17 year-olds] in the refuge, purchase motel accommodation for them and they end up at Centrelink and start down the road of homelessness ... What we're wanting to do is identify those young people at the point which they contact our service ... and sit down with them at that point before they spend a night at a refuge, to contact the family, work with them and do some informal mediation work, explore with the family whether there are other options, an aunty, an uncle or a friend that they could stay with while supports are put into place.*<sup>98</sup>

13.50 A father spoke to the Inquiry in Melbourne about the impact Reconnect's existence has had on his family. Two of the children in his family had contact with homelessness services: the first in 1999 and the second in 2005. In 1999, his 14 year-old son's assertion that he could not live at home was taken at face value, no mediation or counselling was offered to assist his family, in spite of repeated requests, and the boy was supported to move into an independent living arrangement. His father advised the Inquiry that he has had almost no contact with his son since then. In 2005 his daughter became homeless, but the family was assisted by Reconnect:

*I'm probably talking about 20 or 30 hours of work from the counsellor, from the Reconnect. He got things to a stage where we could talk and go out to talk with our daughter, and worked out some things and in the end she actually came back home. But none of that I believe would have been possible, if it hadn't have been for the way that the organisation swung in straight away. There was no hesitation.*<sup>99</sup>

13.51 The most recent evaluation of Reconnect suggests that this success story is not an isolated example. The Reconnect evaluation found that the program was effective, had significant positive outcomes for young people and families and increased the capacity of families to manage their relationships.<sup>100</sup>

13.52 The Inquiry did not receive any criticisms about the work undertaken by Reconnect services. However, there were concerns about gaps in the program's spread<sup>101</sup>, about funding levels and demand exceeding supply<sup>102</sup>, and about the perceived need to offer support to younger age groups and their families.<sup>103</sup>

13.53 Both Project i and the Victorian Government drew the Inquiry's attention to the Family Reconciliation Mediation Program, or FRMP, a Victorian Government initiative.<sup>104</sup> FRMP extends the principle of maintaining links with family to 15 to 25



year-olds who have experienced longer periods of homelessness than those targeted by Reconnect.<sup>105</sup> FRMP is discussed in more detail in Chapter 15 Post-SAAP Transitions.

13.54 In terms of earlier interventions, a worker from an early intervention service in Darwin talked about help coming too late for families:

*It is kind of ironic that we're looking at early intervention and prevention, but it's actually the families that need that service to support their young people not to get to the stage where they are going to become homeless.*<sup>106</sup>

*Colony 47 (Tasmania) told the Inquiry about a successful program it ran for 6 to 12 year-olds that was not re-funded, suggesting that there was a lack of clarity about which level of government is responsible for funding prevention and earlier interventions services for under 12s.*<sup>107</sup>

13.55 In relation to demand, North East Support and Action for Youth (north-eastern Victoria) talked about the call on its Reconnect service:

*We are overwhelmed with family mediation work in Reconnect. We currently, this year, serviced about 105 families ... We have 2.2 workers in Reconnect for the whole of the region. We got a 1.8 per cent increase in funding last year. It just doesn't compute for us and we actually had to cut services to some of our outlying areas.*<sup>108</sup>

13.56 In Adelaide, Anglican Community Care, Mt Gambier told the Inquiry about its attempts to gain a Reconnect service:

*... we've been told that there's no money for that program. ... some of these children that I'm talking about, I believe can be reunited with their families.*<sup>109</sup>

*This organisation and a number of others pointed out that a service combination of Reconnect with appropriate, locally-based respite or crisis accommodation is essential if young people are to remain connected to education, family and the community.*<sup>110</sup>

### *Respite*

13.57 While respite services were identified as a potential early intervention support for families in the Burdekin Report, the National Youth Commission Inquiry was advised by witnesses that respite remains an urgent unmet need that could be central to reunification work.<sup>111</sup> In Geelong, a worker from a Reconnect service pointed out the difficulty the lack of respite care creates for families in crisis:

*There is virtually no place you can take your kid out of home and put them into respite for a week or two while you are trying to work things out.*<sup>112</sup>

She told the Inquiry that a respite service would need to offer skilled parenting support as part of its package:

*... it is beyond youth work. This sort of work needs family trained workers who are at least social workers if not more and I think at least family and therapy trained to get in there and work with these parents.*<sup>113</sup>



## Young families

13.58 The Inquiry heard from organisations and services working with young families and young pregnant women. While most did not identify themselves as ‘early intervention’ services as such, their work with young pregnant women and young families in crisis necessarily involved them in early intervention work. Many of these services had a strong health component and that aspect of their evidence is covered in Chapter 17 Health.

13.59 Starting Out (Vic) wrote to the Inquiry about working with parents under 25 and described its services, in addition to antenatal support, as including parenting support, counselling, supported accommodation, outreach, advocacy, group work and peer education<sup>114</sup>. All of the issues raised by this organisation dealt with the problems that young families experience finding secure accommodation, and this testimony highlighting for the Inquiry the essential role secure accommodation plays in any early intervention into family welfare.

13.60 Karinya Young Womyn’s Service (Tas) works with young women between the ages of 13 and 20. Approximately 10 per cent of the Karinya’s clients are pregnant and the service identified the need to intervene early in terms of life-planning and education.<sup>115</sup>

13.61 Family Access Network (Vic) works with young homeless people and estimates that approximately 50 per cent to 60 per cent of its clients are pregnant or parenting. The service drew the Inquiry’s attention to some of its non-SAAP funded initiatives designed to support young families. These include running a supported young mum’s group and a children’s program for children accompanying young parents into SAAP.<sup>116</sup>

13.62 The Inquiry was also interested in programs that intervene early and prevent homelessness for young families. The Australian Government’s Household Organisational Management Expenses HOME Advice program is a good example. This program targets families in crisis who are at-risk of homelessness. While Home Advice is not youth-specific, its potential to support young families and therefore impact on outcomes for children, is significant. A recent evaluation of the program suggested that it is highly effective and recommends that the program be expanded.<sup>117</sup> In its current small-scale form, the program funds one provider in each state and territory. HOME Advice uses a family-centred approach to support families experiencing housing instability.

13.63 The recent Opportunity for Change report on homelessness and young mothers suggests that closer links should be developed between the homelessness and health sectors in order to create better outcomes for young mothers.<sup>118</sup> The report also emphasised that young mothers need youth specific services, tailored crisis accommodation services, and well-located transitional housing with social support. The report also highlighted the importance of services acknowledging the role of young fathers and young mothers’ partners and the needs of children in services. Pregnancy, birth and early motherhood were identified as significant early intervention opportunities for reconnecting young mothers with their families of origin.

## Findings and Recommendations

13.64 A major early intervention initiative has been the Reconnect program developed following the Prime Minister's Youth Homelessness Task Force. According to a 2003 evaluation and fieldwork by researchers, this was a very effective program, which has contributed to the reduction in the number of homeless 12-18 year olds since 2001. This program has been deployed at about 100 sites but at least one half of communities in Australia have no access to Reconnect services. The Victorian Family Reconciliation and Mediation Program, which was designed for homeless young people in SAAP, also allows 'early intervention' family reconciliation because in some areas Reconnect services are not available. In an AHURI Report, Youth homelessness: Four Policy Proposals, researchers have recommended that Reconnect be doubled or trebled in size in order to reach the number of at-risk young people and their families in need who would benefit from early intervention<sup>119</sup>.

### **Recommendation 13.1:**

**The NYC Inquiry recommends that the Reconnect program be progressively expanded to optimally three times present capacity to provide full national coverage for at-risk young people and their families.**

13.65 The policy perspective of 'early intervention' and the idea of schools as sites for early intervention have been well established in the policy imagination. School welfare support services have been improved and extended in several jurisdictions however overall provision remains uneven and there is no strong push for a national approach on what could be called the 'social curriculum' as there is for literacy and numeracy and subjects considered core learning areas. Recommendations 13.2 to 13.8 relate to some specific reforms that would strengthen student welfare support in schools and inform policy. Australian schools of the 21st century need to incorporate social as well as educational support in their care values. In the US, the notion of the co-located full-service school has been widely promoted although minimally implemented. In the Australian context, social aims seem to be best achieved through a partnership between schools and community organisations.

### **Recommendation 13.2**

**The NYC Inquiry recommends that the Australian Government together with the states and territories conduct a national review of the provision of student welfare services in both primary and secondary schools. The review should:**

- provide a detailed audit report on the extent of student support at school level and across schools;
- identify schools on a hierarchy of need and risk;
- examine the issue of qualifications and experience for student welfare staff;
- compare student support across states and territories;
- propose national standards for student welfare services in schools.

13.66 The following recommendation seeks explicit policy development within the education department that mandates certain standards for student support and work with community organisations. Too often, schools can avoid these commitments if the local principal does not see the value of such work. Generally, local decision-making has many advantages over a highly centralised bureaucracy, however, local decision-making should not be able to avoid large national policy issues. There is a need for policy guidelines and expectations to focus the performance of schools and principals on specifically on how they might assist at-risk students in appropriate ways in their local community context.

**Recommendation 13.3:**

**The NYC Inquiry recommends that Australian government-funded public and private secondary schools be required under a policy guideline agreed by all departments of education to participate in initiatives for the community coordination of youth services.**

**Recommendation 13.4**

**The NYC Inquiry recommends that all jurisdictions develop clear student well-being policies, form a dedicated central leadership team on student well-being matters, issue explicit operational requirements for school principals and councils, including reporting on school leaving and social issues for departmental monitoring as well as accountability to the community.**

13.68 Evidence on the range of social issues experienced by students and their families could be collected while young people are at school. Schools collect a vast amount of information but on some of critical issues, virtually nothing. While there are drug surveys regularly done on a sample of school students, a comprehensive assessment has only been undertaken only on several occasions in a limited way. Recommendation 13.5 proposes that schools as community institutions have a requirement to publicly report on certain social indicators as a vehicle for stimulating improved performance and a way of encouraging attention to these issues as priority areas within the school community.

**Recommendation 13.5**

**The NYC Inquiry recommends that the Australian Government commissions a national at-risk assessment of students in primary and secondary schools and develops a tool and a mechanism that will allow the benchmark data to be updated regularly if not annually.**

**Recommendation 13.6**

**The NYC Inquiry recommends that the Federal, state and territory governments develop a data collection on social indicators for schools, such as:**

- the number of young people who fail to progress from primary school into secondary school;
- information on school suspensions and exclusions, both formal and informal;
- the number of young people leaving schools before completing Year 12;

- the reasons why young people leave school;
- demographic information about early school leavers.

13.69 Accurate measures of disadvantage are important for school funding and for the rational distribution of special needs resources. The use of ABS area data to compare schools in terms of disadvantage is misleading and inaccurate because schools do not simply draw students from a catchment surrounding the school. Special needs funding is based on formulae derived from ABS data. A more discriminating approach using data collected from students who actually attend a school and their families is clearly necessary and would provide much better evidence of difference and disadvantage. This level of information also would provide an accurate assessment of the number of at-risk students and who they are, which would hugely assist school welfare support and programs such as Reconnect to engage with at-risk students and their families.

#### **Recommendation 13.7**

**The NYC Inquiry recommends that the Australian Government undertakes a project to assess the needs of schools based on actual student and family level data and real-time monitoring rather than ABS area data based on the location of a school, which often underestimates the need of students in particular schools.**

13.70 There should be major concern about the progress by Indigenous students in the education system. A significant number do not make the transition from primary to secondary school. Statistical information on students progressing, or not progressing, from primary to secondary school is not readily available except as aggregated school retention rates.

#### **Recommendation 13.8:**

**The NYC Inquiry recommends that the issue of transition from primary to secondary school for Indigenous students and early school leaving be addressed as a specific strategy by state and territory governments, with additional support and funding from the Australian Government.**

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# 14

A major component of Australia's homelessness service system will continue to be supported accommodation for homeless young people. The demand for supported accommodation is excessive; about one in every two young people who seek accommodation on a night are turned away. Only some 14 per cent of the homeless population can be accommodated in SAAP on any night. The transition out of homelessness to independent living has been restricted due to long wait times for public housing and steeply rising rents. Teenagers may not be ready to take on full responsibility for living independently. Many services believe that supported accommodation has lost a major degree of flexibility to meet the varied needs of young clients. For over a decade SAAP funding has been increased at less than the real rise in the costs of providing support services for homeless people.



## Chapter 14 | Supported Accommodation

### Introduction

14.1 The Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP) is Australia's primary response to homelessness. Jointly financed by the Australian and state and territory governments, it funds community organisations to provide supported accommodation and related services in order to help people who are homeless to achieve a degree of self-reliance and independence. SAAP was established in 1985 by incorporating homelessness programs funded by individual state and territory governments and the Australian Government into one nationally coordinated program.

14.2 In addition to SAAP there is the Crisis Accommodation Program (CAP). CAP is part of the Commonwealth State Housing Agreement and provides funds to eligible organisations for the purchase, construction, upgrade and lease of accommodation for homeless people or people at risk of homelessness. It has been the main source of capital funding for organisations providing homelessness services.

### History of youth supported accommodation

14.3 The Inquiry received some interesting reflections from a SAAP service manager in Victoria about the way the youth homelessness sector worked in the 1970s and early 1980s before SAAP was introduced. She described the services as:

*... houses rented on the private rental market, lead tenants and volunteer mentors offered some support to enhance the function of the council youth worker, as well as offering positive adult role models and a link to the community... Committee members undertook "landlord" roles in regard to property matters, tenancy, rent collection and all the associated roles. A lot of hands on work all round.<sup>1</sup>*

14.4 She reflected that in the early days of SAAP, prior to the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Inquiry into homeless children, there was a positive vision of a wrap around service response. While funding was limited, and there was quite a lot of make do work, there was also more freedom to work 'holistically' and differentiate between clients on a needs basis. She wrote, somewhat nostalgically, explaining that:

*... the absence of "targets" and complex intake processes enabled young people to replicate the family experience by moving in and out of the youth housing system, until ready for full independence. There was no restriction to length of support and housing was not linked to tenancy laws, rather more a support framework of choices and consequences.*<sup>2</sup>

14.5 The manager advised the Inquiry that during the early years of SAAP it was administered centrally and contained staff members who were experienced community workers, noting that:

*... those outside of SAAP (as well as from within) often remarked that SAAP was visionary, responsive, creative, with a strong (and vocal) representation of youth workers, supported by regional youth networks eg YASSP, which predated the Homelessness Network ....*<sup>3</sup>

14.6 She stated that her Committee pro-actively engaged in advocacy on behalf of young clients and her service had access to public housing stock and resources (both donated and funded) to establish houses as 'homely' environments for young people.

14.7 The manager was not advocating a return to pre-SAAP arrangements, but rather seemed to be highlighting a time when there were closer links to the community and a less bureaucratised style of service provision.

## Administration of SAAP

14.8 SAAP as a joint program between the Commonwealth and state and territory governments commits the Commonwealth and the states and territories to a nationally co-ordinated response, and represents a major improvement on the pre-SAAP arrangements. The current situation allows for the Australian Government to provide approximately 50 per cent of the funding to SAAP with each state and territory government providing a matching contribution.

14.9 The Australian Government takes on the role of coordinating policy leadership for the program. The state and territory governments do the operational administration of the program, establish guidelines and service frameworks, and fund the community organisations that deliver the services.

14.10 Each five years, all the governments involved negotiate a multilateral and bilateral five-year agreements that establish the strategic priorities for the development of the program. The current agreement, known as SAAP V, is the fifth such agreement. Its period of operation is from 2005 to 2010. The SAAP V agreement raised three strategic priorities<sup>4</sup>: pre-crisis intervention for people at imminent risk of homelessness, post-crisis transition support for clients leaving SAAP and better linkages to allied support services.

14.11 Investment in pre-crisis intervention for people who are at imminent risk of homelessness recognises that timely intervention can often minimise or prevent a range of secondary problems such as loss of employment and disruption to client's (and their children's) social and educational networks and supports. However, there were no new resources for developing this priority in any major way.

14.12 Post-crisis transition support for clients exiting SAAP services represented targeted support to provide the skills, confidence and management strategies to enable them to secure and maintain appropriate long-term housing. The primary target group for this priority area was clients with multiple or complex support needs, such as mental health issues, drug or alcohol addiction or experience long-term unemployment. These clients are inclined to experience cyclical or chronic homelessness.

14.13 Allied support services and government and non-government agencies in health, education and employment services emphasised improved linkages in recognition of the fact that the causes of homelessness are generally varied and complex. As such, addressing the causes of homelessness and finding sustainable solutions can require the development and implementation of a tailored suite of integrated and well-coordinated supports. A problem with this objective is that without new more flexible ways of amalgamating funding from different sectors or packaging such funding in new ways, the objective is weak in an operational sense.

14.14 The state and territory government departments are now working with the services and peak bodies to implement these strategic priorities. The result is that each jurisdiction is implementing the priorities differently. There is nothing inherently wrong with this, but it does complicate systemic reform and makes comparisons across the jurisdictions difficult.

14.15 The NYC has formed the view on evidence provided and on the basis of a series of evaluations that the development of SAAP as a special joint Commonwealth-states program is overwhelmingly a success story, but one which has been held under financial constraint for more than a decade and over a period when the demand for homelessness services has increased. Youth homelessness has substantially increased since the early nineties.

## **SAAP services**

14.16 The Burdekin Report, in describing the Youth Supported Accommodation Program (YSAP), highlighted three main types of support provided: refuges (crisis and medium to longer term), community placement schemes and detached housing workers. Other forms of services were for 'special needs' groups.<sup>5</sup>

14.17 While a particular service could be placed in one or more of these three categories they are not as useful to describe SAAP services in 2007. The descriptions of SAAP services for young people provided to the 2007 Inquiry cover a broad array of services from early intervention and support, through crisis and emergency support and accommodation, to outreach and transitional support and combinations of these. All services are provided using a common case management approach which works with the individual to develop options to resolve crises and move from support to independence.

14.18 The services often combine additional resources from programs funded by all tiers of government to provide extra and complementary services. There were many examples of services that had effectively put into practice joined up service delivery by combining funding and program elements from a range of sources. One example, was the Young Women's Place in Toowoomba, which told the Inquiry that in addition to its SAAP money, it also receives funding through the Innovative Health Services for Homeless Youth (IHSY) program for a full time youth health worker and Queensland Health directly employs a part-time midwife as part of the service.<sup>6</sup> Another example was Anglicare in Darwin, which used funding from Territory Out of Home Care, Commonwealth Suicide Prevention and Reconnect to complement SAAP and to better work to meet the needs of young people. Southern Youth and Family Services in NSW has used Government funding to deliver a 'wholistic' response across all the areas of need that homeless youth have. The combined funding comes through SAAP, CAP, the National Homelessness Strategy and community housing linked closely to education and employment needs through JPET, Connections, and Links to Learning, early intervention through Reconnect, and CSGP, health needs through an IHSY initiative, suicide prevention and help for particular groups of young people such as NAYSS.

14.19 The NYC heard and read a great deal of information and evidence that a major impediment to coordinating and joining up service delivery was the requirements of different sectors of government funding, each with their own set of rules, and from the standpoint of service deliverers, inflexible and onerous administrative requirements.

### *Numbers in SAAP Growing*

14.20 In 2005-06, the SAAP system supported 106,500 adults or unaccompanied children (i.e. SAAP clients).<sup>7</sup> The number of SAAP clients has been steadily growing. In 1996-97 there were around 83,200 SAAP clients.<sup>8</sup> This represents a 28 per cent increase in client numbers.

**Table 5: SAAP from 1996-7 to 2005-6**

Year	Total number of clients/ year	Young clients/ year (Aged < 25 years)	Proportion of youth
1996-97	83,200	n/a	n/a
1997-98	94,100	n/a	n/a
1998-99	90,700	35,100	38.7
1999-00	90,000	33,300	37.0
2000-01	91,200	33,200	36.4
2001-02	95,600	34,600	36.2
2002-03	97,600	34,400	35.2
2003-04	100,200	33,800	33.7
2004-05	100,400	34,400	34.3
2005-06	106,500	36,700	34.5

Source: SAAP National Data Collection annual reports 1998-99 to 2005-06; n/a means data not available

### *Young people using SAAP*

14.21 In 2005-2006, SAAP services had 36,700 clients who were aged less than 25 years, around 34.5 per cent of the client group.<sup>9</sup> This was comprised of 19,100 young people aged 15 to 19 years and 15,600 young adults aged 20 to 24 years. A further 2000 clients were aged less than 15 years. In addition, there were a further 54,700 children assisted with their parents or caregivers but these are not counted in the client number. The number of SAAP clients aged less than 25 years has remained reasonably constant over the past few years (see table).

### *Excess demand for SAAP services*

14.22 The evidence presented to the Inquiry shows that SAAP services are running at capacity. At almost every hearing the Inquiry was told that SAAP accommodation services have had to turn away young people's requesting for accommodation. For example, Kyabra Community Association, located in Brisbane, told the Inquiry that:

*... in the last six months, Kyabra has had upwards of 20 applicants for each SAAP vacancy allocated. Given that young people are the largest target group in accessing SAAP accommodation, the level of need far outstrips the availability of accommodation.*<sup>10</sup>

14.23 In Darwin, three young people told the Inquiry they were sleeping in a car because the refuge had only one bed available.<sup>11</sup>

14.24 In Adelaide, UnitingCare Wesley told the Inquiry that if a:

*... young person turns up and you phone up Trace-A-Place in the afternoon, lots of time they say forget it. Unless that young person is there first thing in the morning, we're full by lunchtime, you know, and we've got no accommodation available.*<sup>12</sup>

14.25 The Tasmanian Government, in their submission, suggested that:

*It is inevitable that services providing accommodation for homeless people will at times operate at full capacity and therefore be forced to turn away people seeking accommodation.*<sup>13</sup>

14.26 However, the Tasmanian Government believed that Tasmania had a:

*...strong focus on providing services for young people [which] is reflected in the low turn-away rates for young people. The most recent data available (2004-05) estimates a turn-away rate for young people of 32 per cent, which is significantly better than that across all client groups (56 per cent). This means that two out of every three requests for accommodation by homeless young people in Tasmania are successful. When coupled with data for those already accommodated, for every young person turned away another 42 young people are accommodated. This is more than twice the rate for the entire client group where for every one person turned away only 20 clients are accommodated.*<sup>14</sup>

14.27 One SAAP worker in Sydney told the Inquiry that his service was careful to avoid being inundated with requests for assistance:

*We have, for many years, deliberately maintained a fairly low profile. We have had*

*referrals constantly coming in. We're always full. We're identified by enough people around the place to keep us full.*<sup>15</sup>

14.28 The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare produces an annual report on the demand for SAAP services. The data from these reports provide statistical confirmation of the evidence presented to the Inquiry. In 2004-05 (the latest data published) SAAP services, on an average day, turned away 193 adults and unaccompanied children who requested immediate accommodation (within 24 hours).<sup>16</sup> Of these, 98 were young people less than 25 years of age. The Australian Federation of Homelessness Organisations quoted SAAP data that showed:

*Each day SAAP agencies that target young people turn away 60 per cent of people who approach their services.*<sup>17</sup>

14.29 These statistics need to be placed in context of the large number of people who continue in SAAP accommodation from earlier requests for support. By adding the number of people turned away to the total number in SAAP accommodation, the AIHW calculate that '... the unmet demand to total demand for accommodation ratio was 3 in 100 adults and unaccompanied children'<sup>18</sup> on an average given day in 2004-05. The vast majority of people who request SAAP accommodation on an average night are in SAAP accommodation.

14.30 These figures do not include the people who are homeless or who are at risk of homelessness who do not seek assistance from SAAP agencies. It has been estimated that only 14 per cent of homeless people were accommodated in SAAP accommodation on census night in 2001.<sup>19</sup> This is roughly the same as the proportion of homeless people sleeping in improvised dwellings or sleeping out (the remainder are in boarding houses or other inadequate accommodation or staying with friends and family).

14.31 The unmet demand for SAAP is significant and needs attention. Even though only three in 100 of those that need SAAP accommodation are turned away on a given night, a substantial increase in SAAP would be required to accommodate all those who requested assistance because most homeless people require more than one night in SAAP accommodation. When the number of people who do not seek assistance from SAAP but spend the night in improvised dwelling or sleep rough is included it becomes clear that SAAP accommodation would need to be substantially increased or alternatives found, if policy determined to match expressed need.

14.32 Many SAAP services do not turn away young people but attempt to find alternative options with friends, extended family or in a motel. UnitingCare Burnside wrote:

*In these situations caseworkers may advocate on the young person's behalf and can often find them some alternate short term accommodation locally, for example in F1 Motels, sometimes with the use of brokerage funds. Such measures are short term and do not address the need for stable, appropriate housing options.*<sup>20</sup>

14.33 In Sydney, the Kings Cross Youth At Risk Project has developed a model that averted a situation where homeless young people would have to sleep out in inner Sydney.<sup>21</sup> The project uses a brokerage support system to place young people in



accommodation such as motel rooms and other places. It can take the overflow from youth refuges and supported accommodation.<sup>22</sup> In Victoria Housing Establishment Funds (HEF) are used in a similar way but are available to agencies throughout SAAP.

14.34 However, not all SAAP workers consider this approach to be appropriate. The housing worker from YWCA Darwin told the Inquiry:

*Brokering accommodation from commercial properties is not really the best way to address homelessness issues, because it's not about stable accommodation, it's about stopgap measures to try to overcome the shortfall in crisis accommodation.*<sup>23</sup>

## Funding for SAAP

### *Recurrent Funding*

14.35 In the 2005–06 financial year, the total recurrent funding for SAAP was \$348.8 million. Funding directly to SAAP agencies was \$333.4 million.<sup>24</sup> Funding for SAAP agencies has been increasing. For example, in 1996–97, \$200.5 million was allocated to SAAP agencies. Once inflation is taken into consideration, total funding for SAAP agencies increased by 26 per cent between 1996–97 and 2005–06.<sup>25</sup> However, during the same period the number of SAAP clients increased by 28 per cent although the number of support periods increased by only around 15 per cent<sup>26</sup>. The result is that funding per SAAP client has declined slightly in real terms.

14.36 In addition, costs for SAAP agencies have increased over and above the rate of inflation. A SAAP worker from Brophy Family and Youth Services (Vic), told the Inquiry that:

*... our costs are going up higher than the supposedly CPI that's given to us and so, you know, there's a 4 per cent increase in our costs and the department says look it's only 2.9 per cent. ... we're continually behind the eight ball ...*<sup>27</sup>

The program is conducted with funding formulae that do not guarantee funding in real terms for the same level of service delivery to continue. The low level of indexation has not matched CPI rises and according to SAAP managers nor have there been additional funds for changes in service delivery such as computer technology, communication changes, accreditation and standards requirements, occupational health and safety, and insurance and wages costs such as workers compensation insurance which have also increased substantially. Over the past 12 years, funding for SAAP has increased by 20 per cent but this has not translated into growth in real terms because the costs of providing services to homeless young people have generally risen at a faster rate than the CPI. Yet the program has faced an increased demand for its services. In this context, the application of a Commonwealth efficiency dividend, which has increased a downward pressure on program funds, is a highly questionable action, especially for a program designed to assist people experiencing the most extreme poverty possible. There is a compelling case that community programs for highly disadvantaged people should be quarantined from effects of efficiency dividends.

14.37 SAAP staff wages under the salient awards have been increasing at a greater rate than government funding for SAAP. The wages paid to SAAP workers are at the

lower end of salaries paid in the human service work force more broadly. Yet the work carried out by SAAP workers is complex, requires skills and training, at times can be dangerous and is often demanding and stressful. Staff turnover is relatively high as workers seek higher wages and better conditions in related areas such as employment services or Government Departments. After a new award was introduced in NSW, some SAAP services were forced to close services, reduce service delivery or downgrade some of their workers to a lower grade on the new award. The new wages levels even with the last upgrading in NSW were still below other human service areas and not at the same level as similar government positions. This ultimately negatively affects service quality. The Inquiry found that, to assist in enhancing SAAP and other similar programs, action is required to ensure that staff are remunerated more adequately that enhances service quality and work force performance.<sup>28</sup>

14.38 According to the Youth Accommodation Association (NSW), Youth SAAP services have been under-funded compared to adult SAAP services<sup>29</sup> and yet are often serving clients with more complex needs. These funding decisions were made on an ad hoc basis more than 20 years ago and have not been reviewed.<sup>30</sup>

14.39 Further, in some areas SAAP services are inadequately funded to provide an appropriate level of care. For example, a number of SAAP workers told the Inquiry that the SAAP funding for youth shelters in Townsville has provided for a staff to client ratio of one to six only. This means the service must close during the day and young people are required to leave. Other services provided information that in Youth SAAP services there was often only one worker on duty particularly at weekends and evenings and in other service systems such a situation would not be tolerated. By comparison, services such as police, mental health response teams and child protection responses always send two staff to any call out or ensure that two duty staff are on duty at any on time, yet youth SAAP services are apparently exempt from these widely adopted standards.

14.40 Low staff numbers have health and safety implications. One former SAAP worker told the Inquiry that:

*Workers have raised concerns about safety and I know what a challenge it is ... for example if a young woman or a young person hurts them-self or self-harms or is violent in a shelter, the ability to respond to go to hospital with that person, the funding is really restrictive in that respect. Provision of on-call and callouts for the work is really under estimated in the funding that the government provides.<sup>31</sup>*

14.41 These services are clearly inadequate resourced and the lack of support for young people during the day is a concern. Most services had tried to undertake some case planning with their clients and assist them with getting back into school or TAFE, and to deal with Centrelink. Their best attempts were thwarted because there were insufficient resources available for case management. A former SAAP worker told the Inquiry that there has been recognition of the problem by the Queensland State Government, but that:

*... these ageing services, the ones that have been around for a long period of time that are slowly you know, not keeping up with the CPI and costs are increasing, so [they are] slowly getting worn into the ground.<sup>32</sup>*

This is a curious position, where expectations are held about what SAAP services should achieve, yet many smaller agencies, in particular, operate financially on a starvation diet. A single worker on duty at an accommodations service might be expected to do all the case management, the case work tasks, liaise with other agencies, attend case conferences, visit the school, liaise with potential employers, deal with crises, attend medical and health appointments, and advocate with Centrelink in addition to other aspects of the work.

14.42 SAAP was best placed to engage and work directly with the young person and their situation, while other workers and relevant programs like JPET, PSP, and Connections would enhance and improve the exit strategy of gaining education and employment as a way out of homelessness. The NYC found that improved responses in linking young people in SAAP to employment, education and training would enhance SAAP and outcomes for young people and that the addition of staff to assist in this area attached to Staff services would be welcomed.

14.43 SAAP services also told the Inquiry of the increasing numbers of clients with complex needs that require additional funding if they are to be supported properly. However, the NYC also heard about cases where on the basis of their direct relationships SAAP Staff were able to achieve results. The wait times for specialist services often frustrate young people's sense of engagement with the services and undermine results that might otherwise have been achieved. Significant brokerage funds to buy in specialist services could relieve this problem. An example would be the provision of funds to bring in a psychologist to undertake brief counselling on family issues as has been done under the Family Reconciliation and Mediation Program initiative in Victoria. The high and complex needs of homeless young people in SAAP are discussed later in this chapter.

14.44 Excess demand, increasing client numbers, inadequate services provision, increasing numbers of clients with complex needs and escalating costs have led to calls from many services and peak bodies for a substantial increase in SAAP funding. For example, UnitingCare Burnside explained that:

*In order to boost the capacity of safe, adequate and affordable housing there is a need to increase funding for SAAP services. The current funding allocated for SAAP V is disappointing and is likely to lead to further strain on the system. Some accommodation options will not be sustainable if funding levels are not increased to match the level recommended in the evaluation of SAAP IV.<sup>33</sup>*

14.45 They warned that:

*If accommodation options close down or are unable to meet demand it places young people at greater risk of homelessness for longer periods.<sup>34</sup>*

14.46 The National Evaluation of SAAP IV presented several options for funding the program.<sup>35</sup> However, the evaluation argued that there was a need for funding to be increased by 15 per cent to sustain service viability and 35 per cent to 40 per cent to meet the demand for supported accommodation.<sup>36</sup> These figures were probably underestimates of the financial impact of these measures. The figures were calculated on the basis of estimates of the impact of financial degradation due to inadequate indexation and the effects of the efficiency dividend. Another way to redress the resources deficit

would be to reframe supported accommodation in terms of community capacity which would assess current need community by community and identify service gaps against an agreed template for a continuum of services. For this purpose, a large LGA or a group of small LGAs are the closest boundaries to real communities of people. This is discussed in more detail in Chapter 22.

14.47 The fact that no real increase in funding was forthcoming in the SAAP V agreement has led many to be sceptical of the Australian Government's commitment to the program. The Youth Accommodation Association (NSW) suggested that:

*After this evaluation the Federal Government decided to provide no increase in funding and to tinker around the edges of SAAP programs with the spin of innovation and investment.<sup>37</sup>*

### *Capital funding*

14.48 Around \$41 million per annum is allocated under the Crisis Accommodation Program (CAP) to the states and territories via Special Purpose Payments.<sup>38</sup> CAP funding for new housing stock for SAAP agencies, whether purpose-built or for purchase, seems to have all but have disappeared. CAP funding, it appears, now is primarily used to maintain or rent existing properties. None of the SAAP representatives told the Inquiry that they were aware of recently receiving additional funding under CAP. Where additional housing stock had been provided it had come from the relevant state and territory housing authority but the provenance of the funding was not known.

14.49 The lack of CAP funding for additional housing stock was a significant concern for many of the witnesses, who told the Inquiry that governments are no longer taking a 'bricks and mortar' approach to homelessness but as one SAAP worker pithily put it "...there needs to be housing stock to put young people into"<sup>39</sup>. Southern Youth and Family Services (NSW) wrote that:

*Properties and buildings are essential to the youth housing and accommodation area. We need access to funds to build safe and appropriate services. Buildings for services in Europe, the United Kingdom and the States are often far better in design and specifications than in Australia. NSW has moved away from purpose building and spot purchase in favour of leases. This in the long term does nothing about building capacity and often means the property is not appropriate. We seek most strongly an increase in CAP. We suggest it needs to be doubled each year for the next five years.<sup>40</sup>*

14.50 CAP was a small but important component of SAAP in the context of the overall CSHA – providing bricks and mortar properties for supported accommodation. In some models a purpose-designed property is essential for safe and effective delivery. The shift in government thinking towards rental subsidies has created some serious problems as rents have steeply risen in recent years. The same kind of thinking has been reflected in CAP, which has favoured leases rather than capital building. While this strategy was a way to deliver additional housing it is a short-term option, and questions must be asked about whether this is sound strategy from a longer-term perspective.

14.51 The Commission heard argument that emphasised the importance of SAAP services and other housing models such as Foyers having suitably designed and well constructed premises. Many of the States and territories have moved away from supporting residential and housing models, a shift that seems more driven by cost imperatives than what would be the safest and best way to enhance the services to young people. Design is essential to enable a service to have a safe environment, an environment conducive to the supports needed, an environments that provides privacy for clients and one that is pleasant to reside and work in. Many SAAP services have been limited in the sorts of additional supports they can provide because of the lack of interview and case management space, and the lack of space for staff training and a computer room and facilities. Witnesses who had visited services overseas had seen excellent examples of buildings that enhanced and added to the quality and outcomes of the service. Evidence to the Commission highlighted the importance of purpose-built dwellings for some youth service models.

## Issues in SAAP

### *Age appropriate services*

14.52 Across the country, workers spoke about an array of issues involved in offering supported accommodation to young people under the age of 16.

14.53 The Inquiry was told that separate SAAP accommodation is needed for homeless young people under 16 years as mixing the younger ones with older homeless young people risks the younger ones picking up inappropriate behaviours such as drug use. In Hobart, Anglicare Tasmania's Accommodation Support Service spoke about the problem of trying to manage households that can include young people from both ends of the youth age spectrum:

*... we may get a 13 year-old in, who may smoke tobacco on his arrival. After six weeks in our shelter, despite the fact that we put a lot of care and try to be as protective as possible, quite often, by the time they have spent their time in our service, they have picked up off the 20 year-olds, how to actually inject amphetamines, different manners of taking amphetamines and marijuana as well.<sup>41</sup>*

*It was also suggested that some services manage different age groups reasonably well without the cultural transmission of inappropriate behaviours.*

14.54 When asked about the response of the child protection authority to the presence of 13 year-olds in shelter, the Service spoke of being told by the authority:

*They are putting themselves at risk, so therefore there is very little we can do.<sup>42</sup>*

14.55 Karinya Young Womyn's Service in Launceston (Tas) offers a 24-hour supported crisis accommodation service to young women aged 13 to 20. The service highlighted some human resource problems and service focus problems with servicing such a diverse age group within a single service that has limited resources. The service pointed out that there are real differences in the:

*... support needs between say a 14 year-old first home leaver and a 19 year-old mother of two recently released from prison whose children are in care.<sup>43</sup>*

14.56 The service recommended that supported accommodation for under 16s be separate from that provided for over 16s. It further suggested that expecting a sole worker to support these young women to gain income, let alone stable accommodation, was unreasonable, pointing out that a single worker was currently expected to support:

*... up to 10 consumers at any given time (six in main house, four in supported units on same site) ...*<sup>44</sup>

14.57 Karinya Young Womyn's Service also reported problems relating to its lack of authority in caring for under 16 year-olds:

*Issues such as permission for school excursions and medical treatments are raised for us as workers in emergency services where we are not legal guardians.*<sup>45</sup>

14.58 Young people aged 18 to 24 years are often placed in the adult system with people many years their senior. While this may not always be inappropriate, some youth services felt that separate services for this group, particularly young males, should be provided. For example, a drug and alcohol service in Canberra, Directions ACT, highlighted that this group of clients could not access appropriate services:

*If we're going to do something I would really like 18 to 25 year-old male accommodation, so that we at least have a chance to give them a hand at the area that they are at.*<sup>46</sup>

14.59 Shopfront Youth Legal Centre reported that their clients of all ages experience difficulty in finding suitable accommodation. While there are a number of options for those under 18s, Shopfront believes the situation is worse for those over 18 years of age:

*When a young person turns 18, the outlook becomes very bleak indeed. There are very few crisis accommodation services which specialise in accommodating young adults ... For most of our clients in their early 20s, the only crisis accommodation services available are men's hostels and women's refuges, which are often inappropriate for younger adults. Most of our clients in this age group resort to sofa-surfing (if they are fortunate enough to have friends with some form of housing), boarding houses (where they are often exploited and usually evicted after very short periods), seedy hotels or temporary motel accommodation paid for by the [NSW] Department of Housing. Most do not have the financial means, stability or independent living skills to obtain private rental accommodation. The Department of Housing waiting lists are impossibly long, even for those on the priority housing list.*

*There are some very good semi-supported accommodation options for young people with adequate independent living skills. However, getting into these services can be quite difficult and, for young people with higher needs, the level of support provided is not always sufficient.*<sup>47</sup>

### *Young parents*

14.60 In many parts of Australia the Inquiry heard about a dearth of supported accommodation services for young parents, particularly pregnant and parenting young women. In Perth, the Commissioners asked a midwife from the Adolescent Mothers

Support Service whether she knew of any SAAP services for her client group:

*Not one that springs to mind for girls who are pregnant or have their babies.*<sup>48</sup>

Given that this single worker service saw 230 young women in 2006, the majority of whom were homeless or at-risk, this is problematic.

14.61 A youth outreach worker from Canberra submitted to the Inquiry that limited access to refuges was a major issue for pregnant young women in the ACT:

*We have an increasing number of young pregnant women who are presenting to us with housing issues. Often they are aged between 17-20 which means that they are 'too old' for the youth refuges and it has proven difficult to get them places in 'adult' women's refuges.*<sup>49</sup>

14.62 In Brisbane, a young mother spoke of her experiences:

*Well, when I faced homelessness I found it really hard because being young, I was under 18, so half the people I called couldn't take me because I was under 18 and the other half wouldn't take me because I had a son, so it was like who is going to help me?*<sup>50</sup>

14.63 This particular young woman ended up finding supported accommodation, but she had reached the end of her tenure with her service when she spoke to the Inquiry. She was moving into accommodation with another service that did not offer outreach support. The Inquiry was concerned about this outcome, given that a number of witnesses across Australia had spoken about the vital importance of outreach support for young parents.

14.64 Another young witness in Brisbane believed that the existing supported accommodation services didn't meet the needs of young mothers. She would have preferred a specialist service for young mothers:

*It would actually be a young mothers' youth shelter I reckon, and a good one, not just some dodgy-arsed, you know, bloody thing, where you're too scared to take your child to. You know, something reasonable, and just specifically for young mums ...*<sup>51</sup>

14.65 In Sydney, Shopfront Youth Legal Centre also commented on the limited accommodation options for their clients who were parents:

*Young parents also have very limited accommodation options. While generally they would be placed on the priority housing list because they have children, waiting lists are still long and, in the meantime, young parents risk having their children removed by DOCS if they are unable to find stable accommodation. There are some very good housing programs for young women with children (eg the Red Cross Young Women's Health Program) but for young couples or single men with children the options are very limited.*<sup>52</sup>

### *High and complex needs*

14.66 Chapter 10 Mental Health and Chapter 11 Alcohol and other Drugs highlighted that many homeless young people suffer from mental illness, have drug and alcohol problems or other high and complex needs. Both chapters also highlighted some



of the problems homeless young people with mental illness or substance use problems have in accessing SAAP services. Some homeless young people have behaviours that are difficult to manage, such as a history of violence, current violent and unpredictable behaviour or have significant intellectual disabilities. Some have combinations of two or more of these issues - dual diagnosis. Youth and SAAP services across the country are familiar with the difficulties of accommodating homeless young people with high and complex needs. The Inquiry was told that there is a shortage of places:

*Although many youth refuges do an exceptional job of accommodating “hard core”, at-risk young people, there remains a shortage of places for young people with very high needs.*<sup>53</sup>

14.67 Anglicare WA wrote that:

*In the Perth metropolitan area, there is generally a limited availability of crisis accommodation for young people, especially those with mental health issues. Mental health issues and disabilities can often become too complex for crisis accommodation services, which operate on minimum staffing levels.*<sup>54</sup>

14.68 In part, the shortage of places is due to the policies of SAAP services, which excludes young people with high and complex needs:

*Many young people with these issues are denied access to accommodation due to the exclusion policy of Crisis Accommodation Services.*<sup>55</sup>

14.69 Once in SAAP accommodation, maintaining a place can be difficult for this group of young people. Many refuges have strict policies around drug use, curfews, etc. In its submission Key College, Youth Off The Streets was critical of these policies:

*Often crisis refuges will exit a young person (for poor behaviour, abusing curfew, drug usage etc) and tell them not to refer themselves for two months. When they do refer themselves after two months, they are often told day after day they can't be accommodated. It seems there are objections by youth workers (mainly women). It seems these youth workers feel threatened by these young people. We acknowledge these kids can be extremely difficult.*<sup>56</sup>

The Commission found that, in the main, SAAP services are accessible and some are appropriate for high needs young people. However, the SAAP service system has not been funded with adequate staff and resources to safely manage much of the high needs and unpredictable behaviours. Many of the exclusions are based on an individual assessment and an attempt to ensure existing residents and staff are safe. At times, there can be contradictions between legislation and policies on occupational health and safety and general access. It seems ludicrous to the Commission to blame SAAP services when government departments have similar policies. We heard evidence from NSW that the State Housing Authority has the ability to evict people for anti-social behaviour and across the country schools suspend or expel students with difficult behaviours. It is essential that service be supported in identifying when the entry of a particular client may pose a danger to others. However, the NYC believes that some intensive models that can respond to the high and complex needs presented by some young people should be funded. The Commission suggests that such models should be funded with a package of funding from SAAP as well as from the state departments of health and the



Commonwealth.

14.70 SAAP services are often the first point in the service system that identifies a young person's mental illness or drug and alcohol issues. However, SAAP workers' skills and knowledge are not always recognised by health services. The Youth Accommodation Association (NSW) told the Inquiry that:

*... SAAP services which could be the first point of call for a young person who has an undiagnosed mental health illness, are actually not getting a level of professional recognition when we refer to health.... we set up an assessment with the mental health team, and they go and present to mental health, and mental health says well that young person wasn't demonstrating those kind of behaviours, or thoughts or issues that day that turned up to see the psychiatrist, so I actually don't think they have a mental health issue. And, yet we are the agents, we're the first kind of point of call agency where that young person is constantly presenting, and often daily presenting with serious dual diagnosis issues and remains undiagnosed and unsupported by the health system.<sup>57</sup>*

14.71 The issue of high and complex needs has been the subject of investigation and the development of assessment tools. A national research and development project by John Thomson from Thomson and Goodall Associates P/L entitled 'People who are assisted by SAAP services and require a high level and complexity of service provision: An enhanced assessment and measurement framework' (2003) developed some instruments for measuring the intensity and multiplicity of needs. The Coordination and Development Committee of SAAP (CAD) will be conducting further research on high and complex needs in collaboration with Mission Australia and the NSW Department of Community Services (DOCS). The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) has been engaged to do this work – to develop an operational definition of high and complex needs, design a data collection tool based on the form used by Thomson Goodall Associates in 2003, and then collect data on SAAP clients from SAAP agencies, analysing the data and producing the findings. Potentially, this work will yield clear and more sophisticated evidence on the needs of homeless service users and the proportions of SAAP clients with high and complex needs.

### *Length of stay in SAAP*

14.72 Many services strongly advocated to the Inquiry that the length of time young people require in the system should be determined by the needs of the young person not on the administrative necessities of the relevant government department.<sup>58</sup>

14.73 Despite this predominant view, the Inquiry was told that some state and territory departments with responsibility for SAAP put in place targets and funding systems that restrict support periods in crisis accommodation and medium term accommodation.<sup>59</sup> For example, in Queensland, transitional housing for young people is for up to 12 months (although this is targeted only to those with low to moderate needs).<sup>60</sup>

14.74 These limitations have not always been in place. The Inquiry heard from a SAAP service manager in Victoria about the length of time that a young person might previously have stayed in a SAAP service and how that duration had changed over the

life of the program. The manager advised the Inquiry that in the early years of SAAP there were no target lengths of stay and that young people left a service when they were ready. In the 1990s, targets led to an average stay of 26 weeks. The support period was further reduced in this decade as a result of a:

*Radical shift to targets and duration of support of 13 weeks for young people...*<sup>61</sup>

14.75 The submission pointed out that in spite of the imposition of this 13-week target, SAAP services had not been given additional resources to assist workers in realising the program's duration of stay ambitions. Additional funding was not the main concern, however. The submission questioned the appropriateness of the targets themselves, suggesting that there was pressure on services to move young people. This pressure was considered to be out of step with notions of the state having a duty of care towards vulnerable young people:

*Regardless of strong advocacy from within the sector it was not possible to persuade DHS [Victorian Department of Human Services] to review the doubling of targets for youth services [through the reduction of duration of stay from 26 weeks to 13 weeks] or consideration of the support periods required for a comprehensive case managed response for at risk homeless young people.*<sup>62</sup>

14.76 The pressure to move young people out of SAAP contrasts with young people in family situations spending longer periods in the family home:

*Curiously this reduction of duration of support coincides and is at odds with what is naturally occurring in the community for young people to remain until their mid 20's within the family home, further disadvantaging the situation for homeless young people and confirming their "disconnection" with the broader community.*<sup>63</sup>

### *Human resources*

14.77 The Inquiry was told of staff turnover and vacancy rates, which are now very high throughout the non-government human services sector, particularly SAAP services. Despite wages rising faster than the indexation of grants, pay scales have fallen behind competitive industries, such as the public sector. The relatively low pay has made it difficult for services to find appropriately skilled and experienced staff. The high vacancy rates and turnover have serious consequences for service provision.

14.78 The Australian Federation of Homelessness Organisations told the Inquiry that:

*SAAP agencies are often competing for quality staff and can not match the level of salary provided to positions of equal duty in government departments. Current funding levels also leave agencies with limited resources for staff development.*<sup>64</sup>

14.79 Concerns about the SAAP sector's human capacity were widespread. In Geelong, the manager for housing and homelessness for Barwon Youth, told the Inquiry:

*It is becoming increasingly hard [to find staff] and it is predominately because the wage rates within this field have dropped so dramatically behind all other professions. Most of our best and brightest young staff we have here spend about two or three years*

*getting their stripes out there and they're off and working for the Education Department, Department of Human Services, wherever, anywhere [except] for an NGO because they get paid half as much again for doing the same work.*<sup>65</sup>

14.80 Similarly, Anglicare NT told the Inquiry:

*Anglicare in the NT is an organisation that has had a really solid history of good staff retention in general, but is starting to move into significant periods of difficulty around staff recruitment and retention, and the drift is across to government departments. More so than to other NGOs. We just cannot compete with the salary structures. We can't compete with the general conditions, and we can't compete with the security of tenure now, either. So it does have major ramifications in terms of the type of service we can provide on the ground to homeless young people, and those things are linked, because at the end of the day, no matter what is happening around the system we know you get better outcomes when you have better workers on the ground.*<sup>66</sup>

14.81 The manager of Family Access Network (FAN) in Victoria wrote to the Inquiry about being faced with a decreasing pool of workers in an increasingly complex system and of her service's efforts to attract and retain staff:

*FAN has attempted to address this by offering a range of options/activities/portfolios and fostering a learning environment where innovation, best practice and research is valued and supported.*<sup>67</sup>

14.82 The manager applauded the rise in professionalism in the sector, but felt that when the sector's challenges were matched with poor levels of pay, the result was a workforce that was increasingly skewed towards recent and new graduates:

*A healthy sector is a diverse one, which encourages the involvement of newly graduated workers, facilitates their growth and retains the experienced workers adding to the resilience and practice wisdom, which ultimately enhances the range and scope of service responses for vulnerable and at risk young people.*<sup>68</sup>

14.83 High staff turnover may also affect the quality of service provision, and not just because experienced staff find higher paying jobs elsewhere. Another consequence of high staff turnover is that disadvantaged young people may disengage from a service when they have to develop relationships with new staff. A young person in Brisbane told the Inquiry:

*I think one of the big drawbacks of the youth system in Queensland is that there are so many youth workers out there that are so good and helped me so much and I have seen the work that they do, and it's incredible, but I've had so many workers leave and you get one worker, and you know three months later they're going to be gone and what's the point of a relationship and working with that person when you know they're going to leave anyway. I got to a point where I didn't want to see any youth workers any more, because of the fact I know they are going to leave. That's lie, but I didn't want that to happen on such a regular basis, and so I decided to stop building those relationships.*<sup>69</sup>

14.84 The industry and staff resourcing issues are long overdue for redress and need to be in the context of planning the implementation of a long-range homelessness response.

While the extent of the putative deficit is now quite large, a serious examination of the issues needs to be undertaken. Similar issues are evident in the Care and Protection area, the effects of which have been referred to in Chapter 9.

### *Indigenous young people using SAAP services*

14.85 The Inquiry was told that there are few Indigenous specific SAAP services around and that this had remained unchanged for a long time.<sup>70</sup> There are even fewer SAAP services specifically for Indigenous young people. One example, operated by the Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency Co-op (VACCA), is the Kurnai Homelessness Program, which provides a culturally appropriate accommodation support service for 15-25 year olds who are homeless or at risk of being homeless in the Victorian Gippsland region.<sup>71</sup>

14.86 Those homeless Indigenous young people who access SAAP services mostly use the youth SAAP services or Indigenous specific SAAP services for adults. VACCA, in their submission, told the Inquiry they believe:

*... that there are insufficient youth homelessness services in place and we have particular concerns about whether current services are culturally relevant.*<sup>72</sup>

14.87 In Townsville, the Inquiry heard from a youth shelter that targeted Indigenous young people but also accepted non-Indigenous youth. However, the witness from this shelter suggested that Indigenous young people are less likely to use the shelter than their non-Indigenous counterparts. She told the Inquiry that:

*... when an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander child does walk through the door, they usually look at the shelter as the last resort.*<sup>73</sup>

14.88 There are several factors that influence access to SAAP accommodation by homeless Indigenous young people. VACCA wrote that:

*Anecdotal evidence suggests that:*

- Indigenous young people may find accessing mainstream homelessness services as problematic because those services may not appear to meet their cultural needs and*
- Many may prefer to 'lounge surf' rather than access services and therefore may have temporary living arrangements with family, kin or friends.*<sup>74</sup>

14.89 In remote areas in central Australia the Inquiry was told that language barriers limit access to the only youth refuge in Alice Springs:

*The only youth shelter in town accepts single young people aged 15 to 18 ... but for young people who don't speak English or English is their third or fourth language those sorts of places can be very intimidating, so they will usually end up in a town camp. The town camp is like the fallback place.*<sup>75</sup>

14.90 Further, there is evidence that Indigenous young people prefer to be part of a group and may be reluctant to use accommodation that is targeted at individuals<sup>76</sup> as is the case with most youth SAAP accommodation services.

## Rural services

14.91 For young people in country areas, accessing SAAP accommodation usually means travelling to a large regional town or capital city. UnitingCare Burnside highlighted the problems of accessing SAAP Accommodation in rural NSW. For example:

*... if a young person is stranded in Wellington in the late evening in need of short term housing they are unlikely to be able to find any assistance apart from sourcing their own bed for a night. The nearest services are in Dubbo and buses are not operational after business hours.*<sup>77</sup>

14.92 The CEO of the Queensland Youth Housing Coalition told the Inquiry there were only two youth specific SAAP services west of the Great Dividing Range in Queensland. The majority of services were on the eastern seaboard meaning that a young person who is:

*... homeless in Charleville, Longreach, Winton, you name it, anywhere west of the mountains, [has] to come into the eastern seaboard or go to Mt Isa ...*<sup>78</sup>

14.93 Requiring young people to move to regional centres or capital cities takes them away from any social support they may have left in the community, including school, TAFE or employment. North East Support and Action for Youth told the Inquiry that:

*... if we ever do find a bed in Shepparton or Wodonga or perhaps in Melbourne, that then takes that young person way away from their social support, their family and their own safe environment.*<sup>79</sup>

## Outer metropolitan

14.94 Similarly in outer metropolitan areas such as Campbelltown in South-Western Sydney SAAP places are few requiring young people to travel extensively. To quote UnitingCare Burnside:

*When there are limited refuge spots available, often they are far removed from the local area and require the young person to leave their other support systems and carry the expense of travelling to the city. This restricts opportunities for casework and engagement with local services.*<sup>80</sup>

## Findings and Recommendations

14.95 The extraordinary position of SAAP is that it is a program that has been subject to increasing long-term demand for its services, but it has been forced to operate in an environment where affordable public housing options for people have been locked in a steady state 'no real growth' pattern. Transition into the workforce for homeless people, even as the Australian economy has improved, has remained problematic. To deal with the complex multiple problems that a significant number of homeless youth have and to seriously support these young people into the workforce, will require new linkages between specialist services, SAAP and employment programs. It will also require a major reconfiguration of how high-need young people should be supported by incorporating specialist support and employment initiatives together with supported accommodation. A lot of the criticism that SAAP has fielded over the past decade, has

been one-dimensional, and not based on convincing evidence. More is now known about the problem of homelessness than 20 years ago and in Australia, there has been a vigorous attempt to create a range of innovative responses on the ground, yet this has happened largely in a social policy environment where investment in social programs has been extremely constrained. The problem of homelessness is complex, affecting a diverse population and to address the problem in a way that sets the ambitious long-term goal of eliminating the problem in its current form, will require the exercise of complex thought, working simultaneously with multiple factors and on multiple policy settings. It will require significant new social investment and not simply reallocations of funds already being expended on homelessness.

14.95 In order to do this, a discourse about actual need and the comparative measure of that need within and across jurisdictions will have to be brought to the forefront of policy decision-making. To some extent, SAAP has been configured by the historical funding provided under the special purpose programs category and by a relatively unsophisticated approach to planning and resource distribution for much of the past 30 years. Only by comparing current levels of service provision to community need can the scale of the supported accommodation response be calculated, planned for and implemented. Chapter 24 discusses some of the issues for this bigger picture policy agenda.

#### **Recommendation 14.1:**

**The NYC Inquiry recommends the needs of homeless young people be documented at the community level, where a community is taken to broadly correspond with Local Government Areas (or clusters of smaller LGAs) boundaries, using ABS homelessness data, SAAP client data, and consultations with local stakeholders to draw on local knowledge.**

#### **Recommendation 14.2**

**The NYC Inquiry recommends that the Commonwealth and state and territory governments expand supported accommodation, using an agreed geographical template, to ensure that every community has sufficient resources to adequately respond to homelessness and the needs of young people who become homeless.**

#### **Recommendation 14.3:**

**The NYC Inquiry recommends that the next review or evaluation of SAAP be required as part of its brief to examine the profile of community capacity for supported accommodation in all jurisdictions and report on the community level gaps between client need and program capacity.**

14.96 Currently, the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program is operating at capacity and the current level of turn-away rates indicates real expressed unmet demand. While there is no simple way to calculate how much to expand SAAP accommodation to reduce demand because an increased supply of supported accommodation will contribute to increased demand for services in circumstances where the size of the homeless population (about 100,000 men, women and children on a average night) is much greater than the number of individuals and families who can be accommodated

on a night (approximately 12,000). The most recent SAAP evaluation canvassed several options for a more adequate funding for SAAP. If the program remained in its present form but received additional funding to ensure service viability, and a realistic indexation of costs, then this would require some 20 per cent of additional funds. Adding in growth as well as cost maintenance would yield an estimated increase of some 40 per cent. The NYC considers that the most rational way to address such issues is against a template of community need.

#### **Recommendation 14.4**

**The NYC Inquiry recommends increased funding for SAAP to address the gaps between client need and serviced provision capacity.**

#### **Recommendation 14.5**

**The NYC Inquiry recommends that funding for supported accommodation services include adequate provision for indexation in order that direct service provision capacity is maintained.**

14.97 The problems of human resources management is a major issue. All tiers of government need to consider how community services can be maintained when their own practices and pay allow them to recruit staff from community services agencies with more attractive salaries and working conditions. These matters need some redress and are similar to issues that plague the state care and protection systems.

#### **Recommendation 14.6**

**The NYC Inquiry recommends that the funding and resources provided for supported accommodation be increased in line with salary levels equitable with other comparable human service positions, working conditions, occupational health and safety, staff turnover and the training and professional development of staff in the homelessness service system.**

14.98 Additional capital funding is needed for some new crisis services for various target groups, including purpose built youth accommodation services but also additional funds to support young people in these facilities including for young parents and their children. In rural areas, there is often no crisis accommodation leading to about one-quarter of homeless people sleeping rough<sup>81</sup>. Youth refuges have been criticised as too costly or an inappropriate model for many young clients, however, an argument for a broader range of youth crisis responses is not an argument against a 24-7 youth refuge. There is a case for 24-7 youth refuges particularly for young people 18 years and under. Other youth accommodation options and models also need to be available.

#### **Recommendation 14.7:**

**The NYC Inquiry recommends that the importance of capital funding for properties be recognised and that capital funding for homelessness services be increased to ensure an adequate level of properties for crisis, medium- and long-term accommodation.**

14.99 The SAAP system needs to do more work to meet the needs of complex clients. This should not be done in isolation but together with specialist services such as mental health and drug and alcohol services. Several jurisdictions have made progress



in how high and complex needs might be assessed, but this has not been translated into an operational national approach. Given the prevalence of mental health and drug and alcohol issues amongst SAAP clients, more training for these specialist issues should be available to generalist workers.

#### **Recommendation 14.8**

**The NYC Inquiry recommends that appropriate responses and strategies for high and complex needs clients be developed and resourced, that provide lower staff-client ratios, and funds to buy in specialist support, as well as funding for new joined up models that enable access to health, drug and alcohol, mental health, education, training and employment services.**

#### **Recommendation 14.9**

**The NYC Inquiry recommends that more training on mental health, drug and alcohol and suicide prevention be available to generalist workers in supported accommodation.**

14.100 Support needs to be given by SAAP services to enable them more effectively and culturally appropriately with Indigenous young people. Also, funding for Indigenous specific SAAP services needs to be considered where this is appropriate and a practical possibility. Indigenous people including young people continue to be over-represented in SAAP services.

#### **Recommendation 14.10**

**The NYC Inquiry recommends that working with at-risk and homeless Indigenous young people be adopted as a priority within a National Homelessness Action Plan.**

## **ENDNOTES**

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# 15

After leaving home, young people often return home at different times before re-entering private rental accommodation. This is normal, but for a young person without that option, a breakdown in their housing situation may well lead to homelessness. Returning home may be possible for teenagers following mediation or family reconciliation, but it is not always the most likely nor the most desirable outcome. During the hearings and in submissions, issues were raised about transitional accommodation. Some young people are not ready for such independent living. Access to fully independent rental accommodation is difficult and the level of support that many young people need is not available. SAAP agencies are not resourced to provide extensive post-SAAP support, although workers know how important this can be. The idea of post-SAAP outreach support being made available to all homeless young people moving into independent accommodation is potentially a way of improving SAAP outcomes by assisting young people to avoid another crisis and to prevent recycling back into the homelessness service system.



## Chapter 15 | Post-SAAP Transitions

*Responding effectively to homeless young people's needs means understanding developmental issues and taking a youth focused approach.<sup>1</sup>*

### Introduction

15.1 In Chapter 14, evidence was discussed relating to the crisis services offered to homeless young people through SAAP. In this chapter, the report examines evidence presented to the Inquiry about young people's journeys once they have left a SAAP crisis service. The evidence includes information about what is happening to young people post-crisis, what their needs are, and some of the services the system currently offers in different parts of Australia.

15.2 The Inquiry also sought evidence about the impact on SAAP services of any shortcomings in the options available to young people during their post-SAAP transitions.

### Young people

15.3 The story of young people's lives after crisis isn't simply a narrative about service provision. It is also about young and how that is lived out. Under 'normal' circumstances (at the present time) in Australian society, few young people, especially those under 18, but including many in their early twenties, are fully self-reliant and independent. The University of Melbourne Youth Research Centre's Longitudinal Live-Patterns Project suggests that the pathways image of a linear trajectory from dependence to independence does not match contemporary Australian experience.<sup>2</sup> When young people are able to return to family, and that return is usually harmonious and without too much drama - their journey post-crisis is a private one. But in other cases, this journey is accompanied by services and workers and takes place within a policy framework with a "... maximum possible degree of self-reliance and independence" objective<sup>3</sup> that is arguably somewhat

at odds with contemporary Australian cultural practices<sup>4</sup> and at odds with what is known about young homeless people's needs.<sup>5</sup> The Inquiry was interested in receiving evidence from young people and organisations about how well the SAAP system is meeting the transitional and developmental needs of young people and whether the existing policy framework impedes or supports young people's post-crisis transitions.

## Leaving supported accommodation

15.4 SAAP data relating to unaccompanied 12 to 17 year-olds who used services during the 2004 and 2005 data collection period at first sight, suggests that when young people leave a SAAP service, their living situation and their accommodation circumstances are not greatly altered.

**Table 6: Accommodation(%), before and after support, 2004-5**

Type of accommodation	Before	After
SAAP or other emergency housing	21.5	22.5
Living rent-free in house/flat	40.5	34.8
Private rental	4.8	7.9
Public or community housing	4.2	5.8
Rooming house/hostel/hotel/caravan	2.8	3.3
Boarding in a private home	15.9	16.5
Own home	0.4	0.5
Living in a car/tent/park/street/squat	4.3	2.2
Institutional	3.8	4.4
Other	1.7	2.1
Total	100	100

Source: Homeless Children in SAAP 2004-05

**Table 7: Living situation(%) before and after support, 2004-5**

Living situation	Before	After
With parents(s)	34	29.2
With relatives	11.6	12.4
With foster family	3.3	2.7
With spouse/partner with/without children	4.6	5.0
Alone/alone with children	7.1	9.4
With friends	17.6	15.7
With other unrelated persons	20.7	24.3
Other	1.2	1.4
Total	100	100

Source: Homeless Children in SAAP 2004-05

The young people who were in SAAP services before support (21.5%) or move to a SAAP service after support (22.5%) will typically be those moving from crisis accommodation to medium or long-term SAAP accommodation. The Australian Institute of Health and

Welfare suggests the movement between SAAP services and the lack of change in young people's circumstances may indicate that young people have few options in the face of their need for shelter.<sup>7</sup> The Australian Federation of Homeless Organisations has also pointed out that some SAAP service re-entries take place because of the short-term, crisis nature of the first intervention.<sup>8</sup> But remaining in SAAP is a positive outcome for young people who are not ready for fully independent unsupported housing, even if it was available to them. Altogether, 30.7 per cent move into some form of independent living arrangement. This is consistent with the core program objective of SAAP. The most common type of accommodation post-SAAP during the data period was living rent-free in a house or flat. For some this represents a return home, but the Australian Federation of Homeless Organisations suggested to the Inquiry that in many cases, when young people's post-SAAP living situation involves staying with friends or non-relatives, this outcome represents a transition to couch-surfing.<sup>9</sup> There was other evidence submitted to the Inquiry that would support this observation.<sup>10</sup> The difficulty of achieving stable living arrangements given the time of stay restrictions on SAAP crisis accommodation is formidable. Access to public housing for young people remains problematic with long waiting lists and the escalating cost of private rental accommodation.

15.5 The next most common outcome was a move to another SAAP or other emergency accommodation service. Unfortunately comparable data is not available for 18 to 25 year-olds as a distinct age group so the same analysis is not available for these young people.

15.6 While SAAP data provides a good indication of the broad movement of under 18 year-olds through the SAAP system it says little about the effectiveness of individual interventions: whether a particular young person's wellbeing was enhanced or whether someone's life was improved in the face of a return to a similar accommodation type or similar living situation or where that young person was in their life journey. What the data does show is that young homeless SAAP clients did better when supported for longer periods, with length of support reducing their chances of returning to SAAP and also having a positive impact on their likelihood of obtaining private rental accommodation, public or community housing, and on their chances of receiving an income through government benefits and employment.<sup>11</sup>

15.7 The witnesses submitting evidence to the Inquiry provided the Commissioners with a great deal of human and homelessness sector context for the broad movements described in the SAAP data.

## Returning home

15.8 The SAAP data discussed earlier in this chapter shows that more than a quarter of unaccompanied young people aged 12 to 17 returned to live with their parents post-crisis during the data collection period. The meaning of this statistic is difficult to precisely establish. It seems reasonable to infer from the general evidence about the factors limiting young people's post-SAAP options, that some young people who returned home after exiting SAAP did so because they had little alternative.<sup>12</sup> On the other hand, reconciliation with family, if some work with the young person and their family has been undertaken is a positive and sustainable outcome for many. If problems in the family continue it is likely that relationships will again come under stress and

perhaps lead to the young person leaving home on another occasion. The 'in and out' pattern has been identified by MacKenzie and Chamberlain as a common phenomenon in the earliest reaches of the homeless career.

15.9 In Melbourne, Salvation Army Crossroads spoke of young people's movements after crisis:

*In terms of where young people move to from T Street, the options are sparse. A minority return to family or move in with friends or can afford private rental. The majority stay in the homelessness service system ...*<sup>13</sup>

15.10 The Inquiry heard from YWCA Darwin that when young mothers can't find accommodation they often end up in situations similar to those that caused them to leave home in the first place.<sup>14</sup> Zig Zag Young Women's Resource Centre in Brisbane spoke of one of its clients:

*She chose to move home with her family, which was a really unsafe situation where her parents were still drug using. There were still significant amounts of violence and drug use in the home and having to return to that home as an only option. ... I can say that there are three other young women whose experiences were exactly the same in terms of staying with us for a long time, who could not access a community rent scheme or any of those methods ...*<sup>15</sup>

15.11 Some young people returning home do so because family relationships have stabilised or improved, with or without the support of services. The evidence related to the restorative work undertaken by the Reconnect program is discussed in Chapter 13 Early Intervention. Early intervention as a paradigm for practice has become well established in the homelessness sector and among youth services. Some SAAP services also operate Reconnect programs, and there is evidence of SAAP agencies doing 'early intervention' for homeless young people through referrals or directly.

15.12 Once again, the picture for those aged 18 to 25 is less clear than it is for the younger age group. The Inquiry did not receive a great deal of evidence about returning to live with parents for this older group. However, the Inquiry was advised by Project i that there is a need for programs to work with 18 to 25 year-olds and their families regardless of whether a return home is possible or even desirable. Project i drew the Inquiry's attention to the Victorian Government's Family Reconciliation and Mediation Program, or FRMP, as an example of this type of initiative.<sup>16</sup>

15.13 FRMP, which grew out of the Youth Homelessness Action Plan in Victoria, aims at building capacity within the homelessness sector to use family-inclusive practices to work with 15 to 25 year-olds.<sup>17</sup> The program offers professional development for SAAP workers and provides brokerage funds to facilitate 'brief counselling' and other support to help young people to improve relations with their families and, where possible, to return home.<sup>18</sup> In 2006, 21.3 per cent of young people referred to FRMP had been homeless for more than two years.<sup>19</sup> In contrast, the Australian Government Reconnect Program funds services that undertake early intervention with at-risk or homeless 12 to 18 year-olds.<sup>20</sup>

15.14 Edel Quinn, a shelter for homeless adult men in Wagga Wagga (NSW), estimates that about a quarter of its clients are 18 to 25 year-olds. The services spoke to



the Inquiry about its clients having already become detached from family by the time they reach the shelter:

*... one of the questions you ask is you know, who do we contact in an emergency, like, you know, if you get run over by a bus, who do we contact? Ninety-five percent - I'd say it is as high as ninety-five percent, haven't really got anybody that they can contact.*<sup>21</sup>

*Edel Quinn described the positive difference that continued managed contact with the shelter had made in reducing the number of clients in this older age group who need to re-enter the service for crisis support. Contact included an open-ended outreach program and also involved clients returning as volunteers in the shelter's broader community building activities such as its lawn mowing service for disadvantaged community members. The service spoke of "... habitual users" who are now successfully living independently as a result of outreach support.*<sup>22</sup>

15.15 The success of Edel Quinn's post-crisis support program suggests that supportive relationships are essential for all age groups in order to sustain stable accommodation, including young people. The particular support needs of young people are examined in more detail later in this chapter.

## Transitional housing

15.16 Supported transitional housing offers young people a stepped approach towards more permanent post-crisis housing. The extent and nature of supported transitional housing is not uniform across Australia. While one of the SAAP program's priorities includes a consistent national policy on post-crisis support, different levels of available funding in different parts of the country, the varying availability of transitional housing stock through state and territory public housing departments, and the variety in the nature of services attracting funding lead to very different post-crisis support opportunities for homeless young people. While SAAP services provide a degree of post-SAAP support and regard this as important work, they are not sufficiently funded to provide needs-based post-SAAP support to clients.

15.17 The Inquiry was told that in Wagga Wagga (NSW) there is a lack of transitional housing for young people.<sup>23</sup> In Canberra, the director of the ACT Council of Social Service voiced concerns about the support aspects of transitional accommodation, questioning the current capacity of services to support young people in transitional accommodation:

*... those organisations are running pretty bare as it is.*<sup>24</sup>

15.18 In Launceston, Karinya Young Womyn's Service had similar concerns, advising the Inquiry about its frustration that a lack of support resources was effectively hindering its access transitional properties:

*... Housing Tasmania at some stage made some commitment that they could provide more properties. But they won't release it, because there is not the outreach support to make the tenancies successful ...*<sup>25</sup>

15.19 Some witnesses raised concerns about service models. The Youth Network of Tasmania, Shelter Tasmania and the Tasmania Council of Social Service advised

the Inquiry that a restructure of SAAP services in that state had had some negative consequences for transitional housing:

*In many instances, the outreach component has been separated from the housing service, and [SAAP services'] capacity to provide medium-term accommodation has been reduced or curtailed.*<sup>26</sup>

15.20 The issue of being able to offer an integrated housing and support service within SAAP as a post-crisis response was of concern in a number of locations both in terms of relationship continuity and youth work expertise.<sup>27</sup> SAAP youth agencies which have established relationships with young clients are best positioned to continue support beyond SAAP, but the capacity to do that would depend on resources. The alternative approach of public housing tenancy support being developed in a limited way in several jurisdictions recognises the same issue but applies a much more narrow range of support associated with public housing tenants, not formerly homeless clients of SAAP.

15.21 In Victoria there was a great deal of evidence provided about the Transitional Housing Management Program. In 1997, the Victorian Government established the Transitional Housing Management program (THM) aimed at complementing SAAP<sup>28</sup> and stabilising people's housing.<sup>29</sup> The program provides interim housing, information and referral.<sup>30</sup> The THM program incorporated most of the medium and long-term SAAP properties and uncoupled the management of these properties from the support for people accommodated. The expansion of THM properties over the past five years somewhat reduced demand for SAAP and Crisis Accommodation Program accommodation in that state.<sup>31</sup> However, there continues to be debate about the wisdom of this change and there remains the problem of transition to independent affordable accommodation after a period in the THM accommodation: ie. exit point issues.

15.22 A number of Victorian SAAP and other services advised the Inquiry that they had specific concerns about the management practices of some THMs and the consequences of the effective separation of personal support from property management.<sup>32</sup> Footscray Youth Housing Group told the Inquiry about its experiences with the system:

*... there was one young lass, who suffered a mental illness. Rather than actually go through the [SAAP] worker around rental arrears, [the THM] just rang her directly and her response to that was to actually pick up a knife and stab herself three times in the stomach. ... Another young woman was evicted [from] transitional housing because [of] the noise she made as she was being beaten up.*<sup>33</sup>

15.23 Family Access Network (Vic) told the Inquiry that the separation of support from property management meant that SAAP services effectively lost workers, but had to become advocates for young people in their dealings with the new system.<sup>34</sup>

15.24 Transitional housing with outreach support isn't sufficient for all young people. In Darwin, Anglicare NT spoke about the need for medium-term housing with intensive staffing:

*One of the big missing links up here I think is the staffed medium-term accommodation-*

*type service where young people have full support, 24/7. ... In the NT there is nowhere that has medium-term intensive living skills development programs in a medium term environment. They just don't exist. They are all staffed externally, and they work great and do wonderful work. What it means though is ... we are trying to push young people into those service systems that are too dysfunctional ... So, they continue to keep reappearing in the crisis refuge or are tripped over into medium-term accommodation*<sup>35</sup>

15.25 In Canberra, Anglicare Canberra and Goulburn concurred, highlighting its concern about young people's readiness to move into transitional housing:

*A lot of the young people that access our crisis services, they're not ready to transition into a medium-term or a transitional independent setting, sometimes [for] 12 months. It can take a long time for a young person to come out of crisis.*<sup>36</sup>

15.26 In Warrnambool, Portland Housing Programme (Vic) focused on age as a complicating factor in transitional housing models:

*... the transitional housing program might look really good on paper, but it doesn't work for certain age groups. You need to go back to a hostel style or a fully funded lead tenant model ...*<sup>37</sup>

15.27 The need to revisit the value of older models was echoed in Wagga Wagga (NSW) where an employment services manager with a long history of working with disadvantaged young people told the Inquiry about an effective transitional service that no longer exists:

*It was semi-independent living... It was fantastic. It was like a half-way house for young people who ... had problems making the transition from home into independent life, and they all had their own rooms - - small, they were, but they had cooking facilities and a bathroom and they had house parents living on site with their own unit at the back ... they also had big family rooms where they gathered once or twice through the week and cooked big family meals, and everyone was involved in a big games room. ... and they gave extra support services on how to manage a budget, how to cook, how to wash, how to clean. Personal presentation. And, they also hooked into the other services around town. That was fantastic.*<sup>38</sup>

15.28 One former homelessness sector worker wrote to the Inquiry recommending a longer and more staged approach in dealing with youth homelessness. The approach included six stages with two additional stages between refuge and transitional housing: specialised hostels catering to young people with specific issues such as drug use (with a six- to 12-month stay) and Foyer model accommodation that involved a community model of supported, semi-independent living (offering a stay of one to three years).<sup>39</sup> The Foyer model is discussed in more detail in the Chapter 16 Housing for Young people.

15.29 YWCA Darwin told the Inquiry about the Headlease Scheme, which enables the service to support a young person through transitional housing into long-term housing all in the one property:

*... the YWCA receives property allocations from Territory Housing with an agreement, which allows for a lease to be signed over to our clients on an approximate three-month*

*... timeframe and where the client is able to demonstrate the appropriate skills to manage independently from thereon. That particular part of the program has been quite successful in achieving a successful transition rate of around 50 percent to 60 percent of participants since its inception ...*<sup>40</sup>

15.30 Alice Springs Youth Accommodation and Support Services raised the quality and location of transitional housing stock as an issue. While the stock is available under the Headlease arrangement, the service believed its duty of care towards young people prevented it housing them in dangerous locations:

*... putting young people, or even young men, with limited problem-solving, coping abilities, would be just negligent on our part. We have had assaults in those units in the past before my time, and obviously that is not an ideal outcome.*<sup>41</sup>

## Stable housing

15.31 Lack of exit options into stable, affordable housing was raised in every public hearing in the country and in many of the submissions received, with witnesses highlighting the particular difficulties faced in their region, state or territory.<sup>42</sup>

15.32 Waltja Tjutangku Palyapayi Aboriginal Corporation (NT) provided evidence about central Australia:

*Very little available and most that is there is in need of repairs and maintenance ...*<sup>43</sup>

15.33 The Alcoa Research Centre for Stronger Communities at Curtin University spoke of Western Australia's mining boom:

*WA is in the midst of a resource and mining boom. I don't think that I have ever been aware of a time in the State when the private rental affordability issues and lack of access and therefore exclusion of all groups, including youth, from that sector has been as pronounced as it is now.*<sup>44</sup>

15.34 The Tasmanian Government wrote to the Inquiry about the problems in its territory:

*There is a comparatively low rate of private rental housing in Tasmania of 16.4 per cent, which means that Tasmanians face greater competition when they seek to enter the private rental market. This is further compounded by the low private rental vacancy levels, which continue to be around 2 percent.*<sup>45</sup>

15.35 Young people do not enter into this housing market on equal terms with other people. A transitional housing support worker from the Salvation Army Social Housing Service in Hamilton (Vic) advised the Inquiry that young people report being discriminated against by estate agents and property owners.<sup>46</sup> A group of concerned workers from Tasmania advised the Inquiry that age and race are both factors in discriminatory practices:

*Young African men, for example, sleep on the streets while they wait for their signed leases to be "reviewed" by the landlord who has just found out their new tenant is African.*<sup>47</sup>

15.36 In terms of post-SAAP transitions into public housing, the Inquiry heard that there are problems with the quality and location of the stock that is offered to young people. YWCA Darwin told the Inquiry that public housing being offered to young people is unsuitable:

*To date, the allocations have been provided in large complexes where there are significant social issues around alcohol and other drugs, violence, high rates of welfare dependency, centred in those locations.*<sup>48</sup>

15.37 Southern Junction Community Services (SA) submitted evidence to the Inquiry suggesting that a welfare and deserving poor model of public housing provision has made public housing less accessible to young people.<sup>49</sup>

15.38 Housing is discussed in greater detail in Chapter 16 Housing for Young People.

### Limited post-SAAP options – service issues

15.39 Without adequate exit points, the SAAP system struggles against stagnation and against disappointing young people's hopes of escaping homelessness. The South Australian Government highlighted the failure of SAAP to provide a pathway out of homelessness for a significant number of people engaging with the program:

*... while the SAAP system of crisis and transition housing is intended to provide pathways out of homelessness, only a minority actually achieves this in any sustainable way.*<sup>50</sup>

*However, such a comment does not condemn SAAP as a program, since to a major extent SAAP outcomes depend on access to the larger system of affordable (both public and private) in the community.*

15.40 In Darwin, Anglicare NT's Youth Housing program voiced frustration with the lack of post-SAAP options, which sees SAAP at full capacity and young people remaining in the system:

*... they are staying longer and longer in our medium-term and short-term accommodation programs, because of the lack of exit points, so it is a huge barrier and it has a huge impact on these young people.*<sup>51</sup>

15.41 Services spoke openly about referring young people onto other services simply because of a lack of housing. Joondalup Youth Support Services (WA) spoke about the pressure this placed on the transitional system:

*... after they've had a tenancy with us for a year, we would be hoping that they are ready to go into [the] private rental market, and I suppose that's the major difficulty, it's really inaccessible. So we tend to be referring to other medium to long-term accommodation*<sup>52</sup>

15.42 The most frequently used term raised in relation to the lack of exit points was bottleneck.<sup>53</sup> The Director of the ACT Council of Social Service gave a personal opinion, saying, '... I think we do have enough refuge beds, but they are completely bottlenecked...' <sup>54</sup> Also in Canberra, Oasis Youth Residential Service voiced a similar view:

*... here lies the problem, there are not enough exit points ... and because of a high private rental, there's just a huge backlog, and you just can't move the young people, and they're the ones that miss out.*<sup>55</sup>

15.43 Services provided evidence suggesting that they are active, even proactive, in their efforts to overcome the immense barrier presented by the lack of affordable housing options for young people. In Darwin, the Inquiry heard that Anglicare NT's Youth Housing program leased an on-site caravan after forging a relationship with the park's owners:

*A lot of work went into meeting with the caravan park owners and discussing the program, discussing the barriers that young people were facing and the situation in general. We found a caravan park that was quite supportive to this, and we leased a caravan for six months. The funding was only a small amount for a six-month period, and the caravan was tenanted for the full duration.*<sup>56</sup>

The project did not continue. Aside from the issue of ongoing funding, the service told the Inquiry about increased competition for caravans as a result of the general problem of rental affordability and parks being sold for redevelopment.

15.44 In Perth, the Inquiry heard about Roofs for Youth, a training package aimed at preparing young people for tenancies and therefore increasing their chances of finding private rental accommodation.<sup>57</sup>

15.45 In Brisbane, the Inquiry heard from Young Women's Place, which is based in Toowoomba, about the community support it has managed to generate to house young people. The service has entered into a partnership with a philanthropically-minded local businessman. The businessman supplies reduced rent properties; the service provides life coaching and long-term support. When the young person is ready, the service steps back and the tenancy continues.<sup>58</sup>

15.46 While the Inquiry was very interested in these innovative programs and relationships, it is neither realistic nor reasonable to expect SAAP and other services to rescue the system from the consequences of housing affordability problems.

## **Young people's needs beyond housing**

15.47 While homelessness can't be resolved without housing, housing alone isn't sufficient to resolve homelessness. People who have been homeless often need support to sustain their permanent housing and their social wellbeing. Young people who have been homeless have additional needs because their age has developmental stage implications. In addition, young people's complex personal histories and their experiences while homeless can compound their situation.

15.48 The Australian Federation of Homeless Organisations framed this issue in terms of recurring homelessness:

*Obviously leaving homelessness requires access to safe, secure and affordable accommodation. However, we also need to do more than this. Research has found that one in four people who exited SAAP into public housing became homeless again in one year.*<sup>59</sup>

The research in question, undertaken by Hanover (Vic) into homeless people who gained public housing during their SAAP support period, demonstrates that over the study period 26 per cent of these people reused SAAP services after being housed and 75 per cent of repeat users went on to move out of public housing. In 86 per cent of cases they moved out at a time when they were not in contact with a SAAP service for support. It's significant that it was single people, under 25, who were most likely to reuse SAAP services.<sup>60</sup> The research tells us nothing about tenancy outcomes of the 74 per cent of people who did not reuse SAAP services. It's quite possible, and highly likely, that the overall percentage of those people whose tenancies fail could be far greater. What is clear is that there is a pressing need to support young people in order to sustain their housing.

15.49 In Victoria, Barwon Youth, an organisation providing a broad range of homelessness services, talked about the support needs of young people who have been granted public housing under the Recurring Homelessness Segment in that state's public housing waiting list:

*... they are the most vulnerable people we have exiting our crisis and transitional housing system. That's their main point of entry into public housing. But, the regional office here expects 12 weeks of support to occur for that, which you have to squeeze into the system somehow.*<sup>61</sup>

In the case of Barwon Youth, the Inquiry was told that a new program had been funded that would provide that support.

15.50 Longitudinal research following Australian families who had experienced homelessness concluded that "... the availability of support networks had a positive influence on stable housing", with much of that stabilising support coming from extended family and from mothers in particular.<sup>62</sup> Homeless young people do not necessarily have family or parental support. Mission Australia's annual survey suggests that while the support and advice role of friends, parents, relatives and family friends is still significant for homeless young people, it is much less so than for their home-based peers. Conversely, and not surprisingly, counsellors and community agencies play a much more important support and advice role for homeless young people than for home-based young people.<sup>63</sup> Certainly many of the young people who made submissions to the Inquiry indicated that their relationships with services are essential to their welfare.<sup>64</sup> A typical comment from a young person identifies personal networks and services as key supports:

*My friends and High Street Youth Health Service helped me through all of my tough times.*<sup>65</sup>

15.51 The SAAP data examined earlier in this chapter suggested that young people derive measurable benefit from longer support periods. Research into mentoring, a relationship that is arguably comparable with the relationship many homeless young people have with sector workers, suggests that when mentoring relationships are short-term they cause harm whereas longer-term relationships of at least 12 months are positive for young people who report improvements in their sense of self-worth and general functioning, including reduced substance use.<sup>66</sup>

15.52 Service to Youth Council (SA) suggested to the Inquiry that government and



non-government systems need to act as 'good families' in their approach in the sense of being persistent and being present:

*I think the difference between young people and adults is little understood in the way that services [are provided]. ... When you have come from chaos, and you are going through that stage in your life, which can be quite chaotic for all of us, there are additional needs for them to be well supported through that period.*<sup>67</sup>

15.53 The Bridge Youth Service (NSW) described the support work it is able to offer as an example of good practice:

*Currently our service is fortunate through having a range of funding inputs that allow us to provide day programs, family therapy and an intervention approach, which is therapeutic and receives ongoing training and development. The day program and the family therapist are not funded through SAAP. There is no planning within SAAP to provide this level of support ...*<sup>68</sup>

15.54 In Melbourne, Project i pointed out that different young people have different needs and that those needs can vary from a rapid response to a 10-year commitment.<sup>69</sup>

15.55 One of the developmental stage implications of the homeless youth population is that they do not necessarily have the life skills they need to live independently. In Darwin, one young person spoke to the Inquiry about the general needs of young people:

*... it's the things like you know, you don't do the dishes or you don't wash your own clothes. You're too reliant on your parents... It's not good. And then when you do move out, you don't know how to take care of yourself, so you end up being like us, living on the streets.*<sup>70</sup>

15.56 Another young person agreed, voicing fears of being dependent on services:

*And there's no real transition, you go from living with your parents to crisis accommodation and then you go basically to independent living. ... there is no real transition ...*<sup>71</sup>

15.57 While young people spoke of their desire for independence, Melbourne City Mission voiced doubts about the goal of independence:

*... is this realistic, appropriate or desirable for 18 year-olds? ... If, at the policy and practice level, we're serious about exiting, we need to move beyond output measures to outcome measures, which need to be thought through from a position of social inclusion, not merely independent from a statutory income or a SAAP service. ... There needs to be greater precision at the policy level around the different developmental issues and therefore responses for young people between the age of 15 to 25 ...*<sup>72</sup>

15.58 Salvation Army Crossroads (Vic) described post-crisis support in terms of relationship stability:

*... it's about having a client-focused service which recognises that those relationships are established and you can create some sort of stability as people move on their journey by being able to provide support when they want it, just as with our own children.*



*Sometimes they need a bit more attention and care and sometimes they can go on their way fairly comfortably themselves ... and the service system as it is, is too rigid and doesn't provide for that.*<sup>73</sup>

15.59 Overall, services reported a lack of capacity within SAAP to provide the sort of transitional and post-SAAP support they believed young people needed.<sup>74</sup>

## Findings and Recommendations

15.60 One issue is that when young people become homeless, but cannot return to a family situation, they need to be able to move onto some form of independent accommodation and the problem of exit points for SAAP has been an issue for many years. One way that government departments have tried to deal with this issue has been the creation of priority lists for access to public housing, such as the Segment One list in Victoria. However the overall amount of public housing stock has remained relatively static. Rental assistance was seen as a flexible way of buying access to the larger private rental markets. The 'affordability crisis' which burst into the media during 2007 has been accepted as a serious political issue in political circles.

### Recommendation 15.1:

**The NYC Inquiry recommends that state and territory housing authorities together with the Australian Government fund a progressive increase in public and community housing stock suitable for young people.**

15.61 The development of housing responses has long lead-times because major government funding depends on the CSHA cycles and because of the large capital expenditure and the time it takes to build new stock. The NYC is concerned that attention should be given to the long-term but also to shorter-term initiatives. The new Federal government has committed \$150 million for housing for homeless people over five years. One third of the homeless are young people, so it might be expected that about one third of the new housing would be directed to meeting the needs of homeless young people.

### Recommendation 15.2

**The NYC Inquiry recommends that state and territory housing authorities and departments together with the Australian Government develop and fund initiatives for new models of youth housing which combine education, training and employment with a package of accommodation and support, such as the Foyer model, and accommodation linked with schools and other education and training programs, as part of a short-term supply side youth housing contribution, but also as a significant component of youth housing provision over the longer-term.**

### Recommendation 15.3:

**The NYC Inquiry recommends that one third of the \$150 million for housing for the homeless, promised by the Labor Party in the 2007 Federal election campaign, be allocated by the Federal Government for housing for homeless youth.**

15.62 The importance of support after a period in SAAP accommodation was raised in evidence provided to the Inquiry. A more limited and narrow version of this concept can be found in tenancy support workers in public housing in Victoria or the SHAP program in Western Australia. Currently some post-vention support happens where SAAP workers undertake a certain amount of support to the client or their family at the point of leaving a SAAP service but this support is not resourced to the extent that some people require, and is not able to be delivered for any extended period of time. A significant capacity for outreach post-SAAP support would be an important enhancement of the transitional supported accommodation process, where the support is constructed at the point where relationships have been developed – i.e. In the SAAP services. In the 2005-2006 NDCA report, 468 SAAP agencies were designated for young people (about 36% of all agencies) and these agencies received \$114,783,000 per year recurrent allocation or 34.4 per cent of the total SAAP funding. To fully implement the proposed outreach capacity in all youth agencies and in all jurisdictions could cost an estimated \$30 million recurrently for one worker per agency. On a properly developed needs basis, this expenditure might extend to \$50 million per year if implemented across the youth sector of the homelessness service system.

**Recommendation 15.4:**

**The NYC Inquiry recommends that all SAAP youth services be funded for an outreach support worker specifically designated to provide needs-based support to former clients who have moved to independent accommodation.**

15.63 Since the mid-nineties, early intervention has become a well-established position in the policy debate with a number of initiatives such as Reconnect, School Focused Youth Service in Victoria, the Youth Support Coordinators program in Queensland and significant improvement and expansion of school welfare services in a number of jurisdictions such as Victoria, South Australia and the ACT. Beyond early intervention and well after a young person has become homeless, there are still opportunities for family reconciliation, which may be a physical return to live with family or ‘family reconciliation’ in terms of a psychological resolution of outstanding issues that frees a young person to get on with their lives. The Family Reconciliation and Mediation Program in Victoria, which has been developed and implemented by Melbourne City Mission, provides brokerage funds to SAAP services to fund professional brief counseling. Evaluation data suggests that this initiative is a valuable enhancement of what SAAP services can do. Nearly every young person who becomes homeless has unresolved family issues and this type of support option ought to be considered for broader national implementation. An underpinning proposition is that ‘family reconciliation’ should not be considered as only appropriate for recently homeless young people.

**Recommendation 15.5:**

**The NYC Inquiry recommends that family mediation or counselling for all homeless young people in supported accommodation be considered for national implementation, with an allocation of brokerage funds according to specific individual client needs.**

15.64 Transitional accommodation or what was formerly referred to as medium and long-term supported accommodation under SAAP have not been uniformly developed across Australia.

### **Recommendation 15.6:**

**The NYC Inquiry recommends that the amount of medium and long-term housing stock be expanded across Australia with an appropriate balance between crisis and medium-, long-term, and transitional accommodation.**

15.65 In 1997, by means of an innovative restructure, Victoria moved to unpack the property management side of transitional accommodation from individual and family support by setting up a Transitional Housing Management (THM) program. While this was accompanied by a substantial expansion of transitional accommodation properties in Victoria, and work done to establish a SAAP compatible data collection for people in THM accommodation, there has been a frequently expressed concern from agencies and workers about whether the current Victorian SAAP-THM dichotomy is the best arrangement for delivering supported accommodation to homeless people, particularly young people. Thus far, the THM arrangements in Victoria remain unique to that state. The tendency for states to pull away from the broad parameters of SAAP nationally seems to have its roots in the weakening of Commonwealth states cooperation under the Liberal Government from 1996 to 2007 and the positive yield was a greater number of accessible properties but it is questionable whether the support for homeless young people is as it needs to be. The issue of what support quotient is required for people in transitional (medium to long-term accommodation) is across all jurisdictions.

### **Recommendation 15.7**

**The NYC Inquiry recommends that all jurisdictions review the provision of support for young people moving beyond crisis services into SAAP medium and long-term accommodation.**

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# 16

Over the past 20 years the affordability of housing has deteriorated – decreasing by 140 per cent between 1986 and 2006. In 1986, 3.6 years of average income was needed to purchase a home; by 2006 the purchase price required 7.0 years' pay. The total stock of public housing has declined and rental vacancies have reached an all-time low. Extensive media coverage in 2007 highlighted 'a crisis of affordable housing' and the issue was prominent in the 2007 Federal election. There is a strong case for a new national agreement on affordable housing that is broader than the current Commonwealth-States Housing Agreement, and the needs of young people should be explicitly addressed under any new agreement. There needs to be a real net increase in the investment in public and community housing; and in the short-term, the NYC has argued for education, training and employment linked housing in the form Foyers and other similar models.





## Chapter 16 | Housing For Young People

### Introduction

16.1 The previous chapter, Post-SAAP transitions looked at the services issues that result from the lack of affordable long-term housing exit points from the SAAP system. It raised the issue of the lack of long term, affordable and stable exit points from the support system. This Chapter takes up this issue for young people both in the private housing markets and the social housing sector.

16.2 Firstly, the issue of housing affordability and some of the consequences of the current housing affordability crisis are examined, particularly for young people. Secondly, the current government housing assistance programs are briefly reviewed. The chapter then considers the actions needed to tackle the affordability crisis in the medium to long term. Finally, a specific model of housing for young people is presented which should be developed irrespective of any housing affordability strategies.

### Housing Affordability

16.3 Australia is currently experiencing a housing affordability crisis. The Inquiry was told that affordable housing is increasingly inaccessible for many young people throughout Australia, in rural areas, regional centres and capital cities. House purchase prices are rising and rents in the private market are increasing. A significant proportion of Australian low-income households is now in 'housing stress'.

#### *House prices*

16.4 There has been a sustained house purchase price boom over a number of years. House prices increased 140 per cent (accounting for inflation) between 1986 and 2006.<sup>1</sup> House prices have increased at a faster rate than average income. In 1986, 3.6 years of average adult full-time income was needed to buy a house: in 2006 it was 7.0 years.<sup>2</sup>

16.5 The price boom presents two barriers to purchasing a house. The first is gaining a deposit, which the Reserve Bank of Australia calculated to be around 45 per cent of average annual income in 2003, up from around 25 per cent in 1990.<sup>3</sup> Saving for a deposit takes longer than it did in the past and now presents a significant barrier to purchasing a house for first homebuyers.

16.6 The second barrier is the cost of repaying the loan. The higher the house price, the higher the loan needed and the higher the monthly mortgage repayment (at a given interest rate). As interest rates change so do mortgage repayments. The Australian Bureau of Statistics data shows that:

*Between 1994–95 and 2005–06, owners with a mortgage experienced an \$82 (or 32%) increase in average weekly housing costs, after adjustment for inflation.*<sup>4</sup>

16.7 The Real Estate Institute of Australia measures housing affordability by comparing mortgage repayments with average income. According to this measure, housing affordability fluctuates considerably but the trend since 1998 has been one of declining affordability and affordability, which is now at its lowest in 20 years.<sup>5</sup>

16.8 For many young people, the great Australian dream of home ownership is a “... dreamtime story”<sup>6</sup>.

### *Private Rental*

16.9 As house purchase prices are increasing so too are rents in the private rental market. ABS data shows that private rents increased by \$36 per week (or 19%) after adjusting for inflation between 1994–1995 and 2005–2006.<sup>7</sup>

16.10 The expectation is that, in the near future, private rents will continue to increase as vacancy rates are at record lows. The Real Estate Institute of Victoria reported that the vacancy rate in Victoria was 1.2 per cent in September 2007, a 25-year low.<sup>8</sup> This is putting upward pressure on rents and is leading to a shortage of affordable accommodation.

16.11 The rise in rents has meant that many young people are unable to enter or maintain themselves in the private rental market, and this trend is evidently contributing to the incidence of youth homelessness. In the ACT, the Inquiry was told that:

*... the most common reason people turn up to SAAP is eviction or loss of previous accommodation. We know a lot of that is about people not being able to afford to take on a new lease. So we know that much of that is that the rents are just too steep and people are losing their housing as a result.*<sup>9</sup>

16.12 Some young people are working but still are unable to afford rent and are turning to supported accommodation services for assistance. This is a fairly new phenomenon, as one youth SAAP worker said:

*[A] profile we didn't encounter five years ago is people who are working or have a source of regular income, and that source of regular income is no longer sufficient ...*<sup>10</sup>

16.13 Young people are forced into lower-quality housing that is barely affordable and not pleasant to live in. One young person in Brisbane told the Inquiry of her

experience:

*It seems to be if you pay \$160 a week you're moving into a dive. If you pay \$220, you are moving into something nice, but you just can't afford to live there.*<sup>11</sup>

16.14 The competition for housing means that landlords or estate agents can choose their tenants on the basis of their expectations of who will be the best tenants and look after the property. Unfortunately, young people have a poor reputation and estate agents will, more often, choose an older person as a tenant. As the Chair of Youth Accommodation Association (NSW) told the Inquiry:

*A young person or even a young couple, for example who go to apply for that \$300 a week, two-bedroom unit, are competing against people, couples in their mid-30s who both have an income, and who have both been working for 10 or 15 years. We can see, obviously, who the real estate agent will take in that sort of situation. So the tighter the market becomes the more competitive the market becomes the more young people are squeezed out in that kind of an environment.*<sup>12</sup>

16.15 Further, estate agents have been reported to require significant payments from prospective tenants just to apply to rent a property. The Chair of Youth Accommodation Association (NSW) said:

*I have heard of a number of real estate agents in the inner-city in particular who, to have your application assessed, you need to put in a full week's rent in advance, and sometimes they're asking for two weeks' rent in advance ...*<sup>13</sup>

16.16 The situation is even worse for Indigenous young people and refugees. While this was a common story across Australia one youth policy worker put it best when he told the Inquiry:

*... that people of colour ... have Buckley's chance of getting any airing let alone actually finding a house.*<sup>14</sup>

16.17 In some areas, the Inquiry heard, youth services were working with estate agents to accept young people and assisted them to maintain their tenancies. For example, a youth housing worker told the Inquiry that in Palmerston in the Northern Territory, a protocol was developed with estate agents:

*... for young people accessing private rental, they were able to access outreach support around their living skills to be able to help them sustain and maintain their private rental, their tenancy.*<sup>15</sup>

16.18 These types of arrangements occur throughout Australia but most require government financial assistance through SAAP or other programs.

### *Housing stress*

16.19 The issue of housing stress was raised in Chapter 7 Poverty. To briefly reiterate, housing stress is where low-income households (the bottom 40% of the income distribution) spend more than 30 per cent of their income on housing costs. AHURI estimated that 860,000 households were in housing stress and of these 460,000 were in the private rental market.

16.20 AHURI also indicated that the proportion of households in housing stress has remained remarkably stable over the past 10 years despite the decline in housing affordability.<sup>16</sup> The reason suggested for this stability is that households make trade-offs to avoid increasing the proportion of their income on housing, e.g. such as younger people continue to rent rather than buy, remain longer in the family home and live in share households rather than single-person households.<sup>17</sup> The Inquiry was given examples of young people moving from shelters to overcrowded share accommodation. For example, a SAAP service in Townsville told the Inquiry of one young person who:

*... moved into a house with five other people because it is the only way they can afford it.*<sup>18</sup>

## Government housing assistance

16.21 In Australia, government housing assistance for low-income households is minimal compared with some other OECD countries. The main policy instrument for affordable housing in Australia is the Commonwealth-States Housing Agreement, which funds public and community housing and other programs, now to be called the National Affordable Housing Agreement. The Commonwealth Government also provides rent assistance to recipients of Centrelink pensions and benefits (discussed in Chapter 19 Income Support) and the First Home Buyers Grant. The states and territories also have some assistance with rent and bonds in the private rental market for low-income earners.

### *The Commonwealth-States Housing Agreement*

16.22 The Commonwealth State Housing Agreement (CSHA) is an agreement between the Australian Government and the state and territory governments for funding for social housing, the Crisis Accommodation Program (see Chapter 14 Supported Accommodation) and other related programs. The CSHA funds three main types of social housing: public rental housing, state owned and managed Indigenous housing and community housing. The Commonwealth Government provides the bulk of funds but the state and territory governments also contribute. Changes which may be folded into a new National Affordable Housing Agreement had yet to be determined at the time this report was released.

### *Public housing*

16.23 Public housing refers to provision and administration of publicly owned dwellings funded through the Commonwealth-States Housing Agreement (CSHA). The state and territory governments own and administer the dwellings.

16.24 As at 30 June 2006 there were 341,378 public housing dwellings in Australia.<sup>19</sup> There has been a 4 per cent decline in the number of such dwellings in the six years from 30 June 2000.<sup>20</sup>

16.25 As at 30 June 2006 there were 186,934 households on the waiting lists for public housing.<sup>21</sup> Some young people are able to enter into public housing from a SAAP accommodation service. However, this appears to be uncommon as waiting lists

are getting longer and priority is not necessarily given to homeless young people. Most young people who spoke to the Inquiry were on the waiting list, having been assisted with their application by a SAAP service. The Inquiry heard from youth and policy workers that waiting periods for public housing were exceedingly long (e.g. up to eight years in Western Australia).<sup>22</sup> As Southern Youth and Family Services (NSW) wrote in their submission:

*Young people are no longer young when they obtain [public] housing.*<sup>23</sup>

16.26 The Commonwealth will spend around \$765 million on public housing in 2007-2008.<sup>24</sup> The CSHA also commits the state and territory governments to contribute an amount of around 50 per cent of the Commonwealth's grant. The Victorian Office of Housing said that Commonwealth Government has reduced funding to public housing under the CSHA:

*Since 1994-95 the Commonwealth has slashed \$900 million from the CSHA, which has had an enormous impact on the supply of public housing in Victoria, and forced the State government to make up additional funds for housing and homelessness initiatives.*<sup>25</sup>

16.27 Some organisations believe that funding for public housing is now insufficient to operate and maintain existing housing stock in most jurisdictions.<sup>26</sup>

### *State-owned Indigenous housing*

16.28 State governments own and manage some Indigenous housing. There are other forms of Indigenous housing that are not funded through the CSHA. State-owned Indigenous housing provides shelter for low to moderate-income Indigenous families or those otherwise in housing need for the duration of their need.

16.29 There were 12,893 dwellings in the state-owned Indigenous housing program, as at 30 June 2006.<sup>27</sup> The total number of dwellings has remained reasonably steady over the past few years. There were 9,815 households on the waiting list for state owned and managed Indigenous housing at 30 June 2006.<sup>28</sup>

16.30 Commonwealth funding is around \$96 million in 2007-2008.

### *Community housing*

16.31 Community housing provides rental housing to low-income families and individuals by not-for-profit organisations including housing associations, housing cooperatives and community or welfare services. Community housing provides housing assistance on a basis which is respectful of tenants rights, including opportunities for participatory management, and constructive links with community development.

16.32 There were 29,474 community-housing dwellings in Australia at 30 June 2006.<sup>29</sup> The total number of dwellings has remained steady over the past few years, despite the fact that there were 36,983 households on community housing waiting lists.<sup>30</sup>

16.33 Commonwealth Government funding to community housing is around \$67.5

million in 2007-2008.<sup>31</sup>

### *State and territory government assistance for private renters*

16.34 Commencing a lease in the private rental market is expensive. Most states and territories allow landlords to require the payment of a bond equivalent to four weeks rent and two weeks rent in advance to commence the lease. This is a significant barrier for low-income earners, especially young people to enter the private rental market.

16.35 Most state and territory governments provide financial assistance to low-income earners to cover the cost of starting a private rental lease. For example, the Western Australian Department of Housing and Works provides interest free loans to cover bond and two week rent in advance at the commencement of a lease.<sup>32</sup> The Queensland Department of Housing, the ACT Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services, Northern Territory Housing and the Victorian Office of Housing have similar bond loan schemes.<sup>33</sup>

16.36 The Queensland Department of Housing also has a rental grant scheme that provides a once-only grant of two weeks rent to help meet some of the costs associated with moving into private rental accommodation.<sup>34</sup>

16.37 The Tasmanian Department of Health and Human Services funds two community organisations to provide financial assistance with bonds, removal assistance and rent in advance or rent in arrears.<sup>35</sup> The NSW Department of Housing has a scheme called Rentstart, which provides financial assistance for bonds, rent in advance or rent in arrears.<sup>36</sup> Housing South Australia provides financial assistance to households including one-off payments of bond assistance, rent in advance, or rent in arrears.<sup>37</sup>

16.38 One witness to the Inquiry brought the effectiveness of this assistance into question, especially in a tight rental market. He suggested that while young people could access a bond loan:

*... if you go to a real estate and say "I'll be applying for a bond loan", you should forget it.*<sup>38</sup>

### *State and territory government assistance for first home buyers*

16.39 All states and territory governments provide a first homeowner grant, which was introduced to offset the effects of the GST on house prices. Some state governments offer rebates or exemptions on stamp duty for first home buyers (e.g. the NSW Government).

## **Solutions to the housing affordability crisis**

16.40 The current and ongoing housing crisis has led to calls for all governments to take action to improve affordability under a national housing affordability strategy. For example, a coalition of organisations comprised of the Australian Council of Social Service, the Housing Industry Association, the Australian Council of Trade Unions, National Shelter and the Community Housing Federation of Australia held a National Affordable Housing Summit in 2004. In 2007 the organisations released a Call for Action for governments to develop a national strategy with a National Affordable Housing Agreement.<sup>39</sup> A Victorian-based group, called Australians for Affordable

Housing, has also called for a National Affordable Housing Agreement.<sup>40</sup>

### *National Affordable Housing Agreement*

16.41 The proposal from the National Affordable Housing Summit organisations is for a National Affordable Housing Agreement to replace the Commonwealth State Housing Agreement when it ceases on 30 June 2008. Its main components are:

- stronger and better-directed funding for public and non-profit housing; and
- a National Affordable Rental Incentive.<sup>41</sup>

16.42 The National Summit group has called for a substantial Capital Grants Program for building or buying additional housing stock for public and community housing. They have also want a Recurrent Subsidies Program to enable public and community housing providers to subsidise housing at affordable rents.

16.43 The National Affordable Rental Incentive is to attract increased levels of private investment in affordable rental housing for lower-income households by providing developers, investors or landlords with a cash payment or tax credit sufficient to attract substantial levels of investment in affordable housing in the private rental market.<sup>42</sup>

16.44 These two elements are aimed at significantly increasing affordable housing stock in Australia in the public, community and private housing sectors. While these strategies will generally improve housing affordability, it is unlikely that the housing situation of young people will improve markedly. Public housing, as it currently exists, is not often suited to young people because of the waiting and bureaucracy involved.<sup>43</sup> Private landlords will continue to discriminate against young people, who will remain at the bottom of the pile in the housing market.

### *Foyer Model of youth housing*

16.45 The Inquiry was told that new models of housing for young people are needed.<sup>44</sup> Donna Curtis, Youth Accommodation Association (NSW), told the Inquiry there needs to be youth specific housing options that provide young people with the opportunity to complete their education and become established in work.<sup>45</sup> One such model that has received widespread support is the “Foyer” model.

16.46 Foyers started in France and have been established in Britain. In Britain, foyers provide a transitional step for young people who have left home or care and are trying to attain independence.<sup>46</sup>

16.47 According to the British Foyer Federation, foyers provide:

- a stable and secure community in which young people can support one another and achieve independence;
- help with finding appropriate employment, training or education to make this possible;
- training in basic skills and independent living skills;
- help with finding permanent accommodation and ongoing support when the young person has left the foyer.<sup>47</sup>



16.48 One of the principles of the French foyers is that they are not meant to be ghettos but include a broad social mix. Peer group support is also an important component and the diversity of the groups brings the opportunity to draw on a wide range of experience and training.<sup>48</sup>

16.49 Foyers provide a degree of independence but in a supported environment. In the Australian context, foyers would provide a link between the SAAP-funded crisis accommodation and independent living.

16.50 An example of a foyer in Australia is Miller Live 'N' Learn in western Sydney. This Foyer provides accommodation for up to 30 young people aged 16 to 25 years who are in education or training. The accommodation is in fully furnished self-contained units each with a kitchenette and bathroom. A computer room is available and each unit has an Internet connection.<sup>49</sup>

16.51 The Salvation Army's Oasis Youth Support Network in Sydney told the Inquiry of a foyer-type housing project that they have been running as a pilot for over 12 months. This is a block of 18 units each with a kitchen and bathroom. There is also a communal kitchen. Two support staff members are in attendance for eight hours a day, seven days a week. It provides an important exit point from crisis accommodation.<sup>50</sup>

16.52 A community organisation in Wollongong (NSW), Southern Youth and Family Services, gained funding through the National Homelessness Strategy to start a Foyer trial. The Garden Court Foyer is an enhancement of a supported housing service for young homeless and disadvantaged people. In addition, a 'dispersed' Foyer provided for additional young people to live independently of the main Foyer site, with outreach accommodation and housing support provided and access to the training, education and employment supports at the foyer site and on an outreach basis. The property has seven individual bed-sit apartments for young disadvantaged and homeless people. Each apartment has its own bathroom, kitchenette and living/bedroom area. Communal areas are also provided including the laundry, lounge room, dining room, outdoor courtyard area, kitchen and a training and computer room. There is a unit for a caretaker and office areas for support staff. The 'dispersed Foyer' includes properties away from the main area for young people to live in but who could also access the supports and facilities of the Foyer Service. Since 2006, the AFL Players' Association and the AFL Foundation have committed to 'youth homelessness' as an issue to which they want to contribute. The AFL has formed the Ladder Project to develop what is called the Foyer Plus model in various sites around Australia, in partnership with community organisations. There were a number of sites of innovation drawn to the attention of the Inquiry and there is growing interest in this kind of model.

## Findings and Recommendations

16.53 There is a crisis of housing affordability in Australia. This inquiry accepts that a new and broader strategic approach is needed to ensure housing affordability for all low-income groups in the community, including young people.



#### **Recommendation 16.1:**

**The NYC Inquiry recommends that the Australian Government undertake a wide-ranging review of the social and economic policy settings that have contributed to the housing affordability crisis. The review should suggest a long-term strategic approach to growing the public, community and private housing sectors with projections of the extent of public investment required over at least the next 10 years to ensure sustainable housing affordability.**

16.54 This Inquiry accepts the argument from the National Housing Affordability summit group that a new and broader approach is needed. The policy thinking about public and community housing needs to shift and the balance between rental assistance versus public housing stock needs to be reset.

#### **Recommendation 16.2:**

**The NYC Inquiry recommends that the current Commonwealth-States Housing Agreement be replaced by a National Affordable Housing Agreement which includes public housing but also deals with broader issues of affordability in terms of public-private community housing and the development of private rental housing for low income individuals and families.**

16.55 As part of such a strategy, taxation incentives for public-private ventures and private rental accommodation registered as available for sub-market affordable rental need to be considered. Existing tax-related provisions such as capital gains tax exemptions and negative gearing have not contributed to encouraging the building of affordable housing stock and are expensive and ineffective incentives. Tax reform in this area should be constructed so as to make it more attractive for private investors to invest in housing projects for lower income families and individuals.

#### **Recommendation 16.3:**

**The NYC Inquiry recommends that the Australian Government consider tax incentives for private investment in affordable housing projects for low-income individuals and families.**

16.56 The lack of affordability of housing is blocking people from exiting SAAP services. Solutions to the housing affordability crisis include funding for capital and operating costs of social housing. Young people have specific needs and much of the public housing stock is ill-suited to housing young people. Additionally, many young people are not ready for the independent living in public housing. The Foyer model offers an integrated approach to support young people in their accommodation, education and training, and employment. Foyers ideally require a commitment to education, training and employment as a condition of access, open-ended tenure, an extensive program of support services and program for residents and social enterprise opportunities linked to or part of the model. The accommodation is studio/bed-sits or one-bedroom flats. Foyers can be a dispersed network of accommodation in the same general locality or a large high-rise building, and what is generally appropriate in Australia cities and towns will be different from what can and should be done in American capital cities. Foyers developed in public-private ventures could accommodate a broader cross-section of

young Australians than just young people who have been homeless. In the longer-term, the social mix ought to be managed with diversity as a core social goal.

**Recommendation 16.4:**

**The NYC Inquiry recommends that the Australian Government urgently develop a significant new stock of affordable housing for young people based on an Australian version of the Foyer Model as well as exploring other education, training and employment related housing models as a significant component of long-term housing provision for young people.**

16.57 While there are a range of measures that need to happen under the proposed National Affordable Housing Agreement, increased funding for public housing will be necessary alongside private sector incentives and rental assistance. The increase in funding will need to be sustained over a long period of time and contribute to the redevelopment and upgrading of existing stock as well as building new stock.

**Recommendation 16.5:**

**The NYC inquiry recommends that additional funds be provided to enable the states and territories to acquire and build additional public housing stock for young people.**

16.58 Despite the issues of high-rise estates and single suburb public housing estates and the objective of achieving a social mix in the community to avoid putting people with low incomes and complex needs in the same locality, in practice, the policy of priority into public housing for homeless people has tended to increase the proportion of high needs people on an estate. In Victoria, there are ambitious plans to redevelop the high-rise housing estates close to central Melbourne. Such plans are premised on inner-urban locations, public-private partnership with major developers, with the objective of creating new apartments in the same locale as well as refurbishing the existing public housing stock on site. To what extent, this approach results in a real change in the social mix of household living in close proximity and changes the ambience of the estate remains to be seen. The Carlton estate will be the test case for how this is likely to turn out.

16.59 In some areas, there is a lack of crisis accommodation. This is particularly evident in rural areas where up to one-quarter of the homeless population may be sleeping out or inhabiting some form of improvised dwelling. Communities need a balance of support and supported accommodation to provide a timely response to people who have become homeless.

**Recommendation 16.6:**

**The NYC Inquiry recommends that the Crisis Accommodation Program guidelines be extended to allow for the urgent provision of medium and long-term supported accommodation for young people and that funding levels be significantly increased to meet these new objectives.**

16.60 Although the Australian Government and the state and territory governments are the signatories to agreements such as the CSHA or what might succeed the current

CSHA, an active role for local government needs to be facilitated in order to strengthen communities.

**Recommendation 16.7:**

**The NYC Inquiry recommends that the Australian Government and state and territory jurisdictions consider how local government could be more involved in the development of affordable housing through the implementation of appropriate local planning policies. Additional funds will need to be allocated to facilitate the development of capacity in local government.**

16.61 Commonwealth Rental Assistance, introduced in 1992 for 16 to 17 year olds receiving Job Search Allowance at the Independent or Homeless rate, was regarded as a more flexible measure, than a total reliance on access to public housing. However, the underpinning assumption of this policy is that household income is the only problem. CRA policy ignores the availability of rental housing, whether the rents are affordable even with the assistance and issues of location, housing quality and amenities, as well as tenants support needs and rights, all of which are important for homeless young people. The rate of CRA is standardised everywhere across Australia ignoring the fact that rents may vary widely between different regions. CRA recipients tend to gravitate to areas where unemployment rates are higher but rents are lower. In areas of economic development where rents are higher, CRA recipients cannot afford to live there so are disadvantaged in gaining access to labour market opportunities in those areas. Two measures are worth considering – firstly, adjust CRA rates according to regional rental levels and secondly, provide incentives for private landlords to lease properties and rents, which can be reasonably afforded by individuals and families on low incomes - a National Affordable Rental Incentive Scheme.

**Recommendation 16.8:**

**The NYC Inquiry recommends that Commonwealth Rental Assistance be continued but reviewed with a view to considering adjustments that take account of regional differences in private rental markets.**

## ENDNOTES

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# 17

There is a clear link between homelessness and a series of health issues. Mental health issues and drug and alcohol addictions and substance abuse are experienced by a significant group of young people in the homeless population, and often co-occur. Family breakdown is often accompanied by trauma, grief and a disturbed emotional state. Being homeless involves a lifestyle with many health risks. Youth-specific health services, many designed under the Innovative Health Services for Homeless Young People (IHSY) program, have been demonstrably successful. The gaps in drug and alcohol and mental health services for young people particularly affect homeless youth, where obtaining stable accommodation is necessary for progress in any longer-term health treatments. Current systems have difficulty in handling young people with high and complex needs and co-morbidity. Regional, rural and remote health care problems are due to sparse populations, large distances and the higher costs of providing services. The NYC recommends that the successes of the IHSY be extended more broadly to achieve a rational national deployment of services tailored to the needs of homeless young people.





## Chapter 17 | Health

*The risks for these young women are duplicated for their unborn children. Exposed to the elements, stress, and poor nutrition, they are prone to contracting communicable diseases – from colds and gastritis to influenza. Infants born into the disadvantage being experienced by homeless young women are particularly vulnerable. We all recognise just how tiring pregnancy can be, and the need for healthy living throughout pregnancy. What must it be to be alone and homeless facing the prospect of birth?<sup>1</sup>*

### Introduction

17.1 Young people, workers and services offered the Inquiry an intimate and detailed view of the health of young homeless people and of the systems available to respond to young peoples' needs.

17.2 The accounts given to the NYC of young people's struggles with addiction and mental illness were disturbing. The way these issues affect the lives of young people has been examined in more detail in Chapter 10 Mental Health and in Chapter 11 Alcohol and other Drugs. In this chapter, mental health and substance abuse are discussed in terms of the evidence about the availability, adequacy, appropriateness and timeliness of health services to support young homeless and at-risk people with health problems.

17.3 Witnesses to the Inquiry also provided evidence about the effect of trauma and grief in the lives of many young homeless people and how there can be a continuing effect on emotionality.<sup>2</sup> Also, some testimony on the effect of traumas has been provided in the earlier chapters, which dealt with the causes and the experience of homelessness. The Inquiry heard that experiences such as losing family members, parental addiction and parental mental illness, multiple failed out of home placements, rejection, abuse at home and abuse once homeless can have a devastating impact on young people. In this chapter, those emotional issues are cast in terms of young people's need for counselling and other support to achieve a stable emotional life and better mental health.

17.4 The Burdekin Report gathered evidence about the risks to life and general health experienced by young homeless people.<sup>3</sup> The evidence provided to this Inquiry confirms that those risks continue. Services and young homeless people presented accounts of malnutrition<sup>4</sup>, dental problems<sup>5</sup>, tissue injuries<sup>6</sup>, sexually transmitted infections<sup>7</sup>, disability<sup>8</sup>, and debilitating conditions<sup>9</sup>. The Inquiry also heard a great deal of evidence about young pregnant women and young parents. Significantly, AIDS was not raised as a particular problem in this Inquiry, as might have been expected from some of the predictions aired in the Burdekin Report.<sup>10</sup>

## **Innovative Health Services for Homeless Youth**

17.5 Brisbane Youth Service, on behalf of a group of Queensland services, highlighted the fact that the Burdekin Report<sup>11</sup> provided the first real recognition of the specific healthcare needs of young homeless people and resulted in the introduction in 1991 of the Innovative Health Services for Homeless Youth Program, or IHSHY, as a pilot program.<sup>12</sup> IHSHY was and is jointly funded by the Australian and state and territory governments and has the specific aim of improving health outcomes for homeless and at-risk 12 to 24 year-olds and their dependents.<sup>13</sup>

17.6 IHSHY funds a range of health services across Australia, a number of which provided evidence to the Inquiry about the work they do, the evolution of the program and the healthcare needs of at-risk and homeless young people.<sup>14</sup> A 2003 review of the program by Community Link Australia found that IHSHY services have a high impact in relation to the size of the program and the funds allocated to it.<sup>15</sup> That finding is consistent with the evidence submitted to the Inquiry.

17.7 The Child and Adolescent Health Service in the Western Australian Department of Health told the Inquiry that IHSHY services have been particularly successful in reaching marginalised young people, including Indigenous young people:

*These clients typically have complex physical and mental health issues and related social issues. If they are not supported, these needs exacerbate leading to presentations at emergency departments and an increased burden on hospitals and other services.*<sup>16</sup>

17.8 Brisbane Youth Service also emphasised the vital importance of IHSHY: *[It] is inarguably one of the most significant and useful programs targeting young homeless people that continues to promote positive health outcomes and combat the negative environmental and behavioural determinants for young people and their dependents experiencing homelessness.*<sup>17</sup>

17.9 Currently, Australian Government funding is provided to the states and territories for the program on a matched basis.<sup>18</sup> The NSW Association for Adolescent Health, the peak body for the youth health sector in that state, told the Inquiry that the current funding received by NSW is insufficient, that some locations have no IHSHY services and that existing services have experienced an erosion in funding, with an impact on staffing levels.<sup>19</sup> The Child and Adolescent Health Service in the Western Australian Department of Health advised the Inquiry that its state contributes extra funding to the program.<sup>20</sup> The Victorian Government expressed its concerns that the purchasing parity of the program has declined.<sup>21</sup>

## Primary Health Services

17.10 The National Youth Commission received evidence that homeless young people experience a variety of health problems.

17.11 A nurse from the Young People's Health Service in Melbourne told the Inquiry about internal research that had identified the top five presenting problems for young homeless people using the service:

*Sexual health and viruses and also soft tissue injury related to violence, which is quite common, unplanned pregnancy, mental health issues are quite high on the list and ever increasing, drug and alcohol ...*<sup>22</sup>

17.12 JIGSAW Young Person's Health Service in Geelong (Vic) told the Commission that young people are presenting to its GPs with Hepatitis C, sexual health issues, high numbers of pregnancies, smoking-related difficulties and, in about 60 per cent of cases, emotional problems.<sup>23</sup>

17.13 The Inquiry heard that locating bulk billing GPs who understand youth homelessness is very difficult. Attracting GPs and retaining them within youth health services is also a significant problem. The Young People's Health Service in Victoria, outlined some of the issues:

*[A doctor] earned \$50 an afternoon, working in Frontyard, hardly worth his while ...*<sup>24</sup>

17.14 The Inquiry was advised that young people have trouble accessing mainstream health services. In addition to the problem of GP remuneration mentioned by Frontyard, other witnesses advised the Inquiry that:

- lack of Medicare cards;<sup>25</sup>
- concerns about confidentiality;<sup>26</sup>
- consent issues;<sup>27</sup>
- lack of housing;<sup>28</sup>
- poverty;<sup>29</sup>
- lack of transport;<sup>30</sup>
- lack of doctors in general and bulk-billing doctors in particular;<sup>31</sup>
- fear of stigma;<sup>32</sup>
- needs of teens to have support with navigating the system;<sup>33</sup>
- problems coping with appointment based systems;<sup>34</sup>
- can all contribute to making mainstream general practices and other mainstream healthcare services difficult for young homeless and at-risk people to use.

17.15 Non-mainstream health services have developed in response to the needs of homeless and at-risk young people. Jigsaw Young Person's Health Service in Geelong (Vic) is one example. It incorporates mental health services, drug and alcohol services, sexual health services and links with youth-friendly GPs and is located in the Corio shopping centre:

*The idea being that I guess young people do tend to congregate in shopping centres and it had ease of access and ... public transport and that seems to be working reasonably well.*<sup>35</sup>

17.16 The Street Doctor service in Perth offers a different model. It is run by a division of general practice, but provides GP, nursing and outreach services from a mobile van, visiting high-risk schools and locations where young homeless people frequent.<sup>36</sup> Another interesting example is the Quarry Street General Practice, which is also in Western Australia. Quarry Street is a free general practice for young people, where there is no requirement for a Medicare card.<sup>37</sup>

17.17 The NSW Association for Adolescent Health advised the Inquiry about a decline in public dental services, noting that few youth health services offer dental health treatment. The Association told the Inquiry that there are no incentives for private dental practices to provide dental care for marginalised people:

*The links between oral and general health are well known. Given that homeless and marginalised young people often have poor oral health, it is important that potential barriers to receiving treatment are minimised wherever possible. Poor oral health exacerbates the disadvantage homeless young people are already experiencing, limiting their social networks due to shame and embarrassment, damaging their self-esteem and limiting their ability to secure meaningful employment.*<sup>38</sup>

## Pregnancy and parenting

17.18 The National Youth Commission was advised about the difficult circumstances faced by young homeless women who are pregnant and young parents, and of the increasingly high numbers of young parents that certain services are seeing.<sup>39</sup>

17.19 Witnesses spoke of young pregnant women suffering quite shocking levels of abuse from members of the public, which suggests that services which require them to mix with older pregnant women and older mums are unlikely to be perceived as friendly, welcoming environments.<sup>40</sup> In Perth, the Adolescent Mothers Support Service spoke of the reality of delivering health services to pregnant teenagers and the importance of being able to offer outreach services:

*... adolescents being adolescents their problems are manifold and they are frequent poor attenders and they are also late attenders to healthcare. They don't attend GPs and they don't actually find out that they are pregnant or actually say they are pregnant until very late sometimes. I had two girls who had Down Syndrome babies last year, because they didn't present until they were 36 weeks gestation. Now, there is then nothing to do for them apart from support them and then link them into some very high cost services for a long, long time and that's their first baby.*<sup>41</sup>

This single-worker service advised the Inquiry of the high level of demand for outreach antenatal care. The Inquiry was concerned about sustainability in terms of human resources. The need being addressed is demonstrable but the funding does not appear to be established in a recurrent form.

17.20 Health Connections for Youth(HCY) a non-clinical youth health service in Darwin told the Inquiry that young parents now comprise 60 per cent of HCY's client group:

*As a result of us having such a large majority of young people with pregnancy and parenting issues, we developed a program or a project that was to provide antenatal education and support to young parents, and this was a really successful project that ceased in 2006, and it was Commonwealth funded. It was through the Stronger Families and Communities Local Answers funding. We actually provided support and education to over 110 young parents in that two-year period. ... Seventy-four percent of our parents who went through those programs took on breast feeding, which I am informed by midwives throughout the health system is huge.<sup>42</sup>*

This program was not refunded by the Commonwealth Government.

17.21 The needs of young Indigenous and refugee women were also highlighted. The Inquiry heard that pregnancy numbers are increasing within these groups and that there are opportunities to provide pregnancy and parenting information provided adequate funding is forthcoming.<sup>43</sup>

### **Behavioural support services**

17.22 The Inquiry was told that young homeless disabled people who are not considered sufficiently disabled by disability services miss out on much-needed help, including behavioural support,<sup>44</sup> in spite of the reality that they often have lifelong support needs.<sup>45</sup>

17.23 In terms of behavioural support services, Shopfront Youth Legal Centre in NSW compared the contrasting outcomes for two individuals with broadly similar issues, 'Jack' and 'Simon'. Jack had a mild intellectual disability and had experienced abuse while growing up:

*With the involvement of some good youth services, Jack managed to attain a degree of stability, including housing. .... However, Jack still has unresolved issues, which need to be addressed through counselling and cognitive behavioural therapy. One of the most pressing issues is what is commonly referred to as "anger management" - in particular, learning to manage his responses to stressful situations such as police contact.<sup>46</sup>*

However, Shopfront was not able to satisfy the Department of Ageing, Disability and Home Care that Jack had a developmental disability, and no other suitable service could be found to fill the gap.

17.24 Simon, on the other hand, was accepted into the intensive program:

*Simon is 19 and has a moderate intellectual disability. His parents had very high expectations of him and refused to accept that he had a disability. This eventually led to a breakdown in their relationship and Simon went to a refuge when he was about 16. Since then, Simon has come to the attention of the police a few times, mainly for being involved in fights, once for being a passenger in a stolen car and once for being in possession of a weapon. On most of these occasions it appears that he was "led astray" by*

*older and more sophisticated friends. Fortunately Simon has received excellent support from both government and non-government services. He has stable, semi-independent accommodation through the Salvation Army. He has received case management from The Crossing, an intensive case management and support service run by Mission Australia. Significantly, he was successfully referred to DADHC, where he has a caseworker and has also received assistance from the Behaviour Intervention Service.*<sup>47</sup>

In terms of the practicalities of their lives, Jack and Simon both have serious issues to deal with. But in Simon's case a range of support services, including, importantly, supported accommodation, is available, while Jack has been unable to access the same level of services. There may be issues in the way the Department makes assessments or it may be a case of serendipitous difference. The extent to which these young men have been able to access services seems to be the deciding factor in what has changed for them.

## **Drug and alcohol services**

17.25 The Inquiry heard from workers across the homelessness sector that the number of young people with illegal and legal drug abuse seems to be increasing.<sup>48</sup> Witnesses presented evidence about some excellent and innovative drug and alcohol services, but many spoke and wrote of service gaps across Australia. Unsurprisingly and somewhat understandably, many rural and remote communities do not have drug and alcohol services; more worrying, and less understandable were the service gaps in regional centres and smaller cities which mean that for young people access is highly problematic and dislocating.

17.26 The director of one of the youth peak bodies in Queensland spoke of having only four detoxification beds for youth in that state and of the measures resorted to by workers:

*What a lot of youth workers are doing in the suburbs is attempting detoxing and into some sort of quite dangerous stuff but on their own backs. So things like allowing people to sleep in the youth worker's car or taking them out of suburbs, it's a common practice*<sup>49</sup>

17.27 In Darwin, the Drug and Alcohol Intensive Support for Youth, DAISY, described not having a residential rehabilitation service for young people and spoke of referring young people to adult residential rehabilitation services locally, and on several occasions sending young people to Melbourne. Melbourne was chosen because it was the only place where DAISY could locate a service that was willing to accept referrals from the Northern Territory:

*It took a bit of doing, like they said, "No, no it's too difficult. What about repatriation should it not work out? What about family visits and things like that?" There were a lot of teleconferences and stuff like that before we were able to refer our first young person.*<sup>50</sup>

17.28 In Launceston, a crisis accommodation service told the Inquiry that there are no appropriate detoxification or rehabilitation services for the young people they work with, not even a suitable home detoxification service. When asked by one of the Commissioners about how they managed that service gap, one of the workers exclaimed:

*Ah, harm minimisation. That is really about all we can do.*<sup>51</sup>

17.29 Where mainstream drug and alcohol services exist in a locality, young homeless people often have no access to those services. The Inquiry was told that in Darwin, 18 and 19 year-olds were being turned away from adult services for being too young.<sup>52</sup> Where services existed and were theoretically willing to accept homeless young people, service practices sometimes presented unreasonable barriers. The Shopfront Youth Legal Centre in Sydney told the Inquiry:

*Residential detoxification services are very difficult to get into, waiting lists are long and prospective applicants are often required to telephone frequently (sometimes daily) to maintain their place on their waiting list. ... many detox services are area-based and are not available to people who cannot demonstrate that they live in a particular area. Long-term rehabilitation services are similarly difficult to access, particularly as many require a period of detox first.*<sup>53</sup>

17.30 The Youth Drug and Alcohol Service (Sydney West Area Health Services) offers a hospital-based, inpatient, statewide withdrawal service for 12-20 year-olds:

*... we have actually admitted people to hospital, much to the displeasure of the medical officers, who haven't needed to be admitted to hospital because we've had nowhere else to manage them at all, and it's impossible for them to address their drug use when they're on the street.*<sup>54</sup>

17.31 Where accessible residential adolescent specific services exist, the Inquiry heard that they are in great demand.<sup>55</sup>

17.32 Homeless and at-risk young people need a range of timely drug and alcohol service options, which offer incremental engagement with trusted service providers. Without exception, the Inquiry was advised that young people up to the age of 25 need adolescent specific services. The minimum recommended service pathway seemed to include socially inclusive harm minimisation programs, residential detoxification programs, detoxification respite, residential rehabilitation, and post-rehabilitation supported housing options. What was not raised by witnesses, was early intervention for at-risk young people in terms of the support needs of non-drug-using family members, and whether such interventions could act to reduce family breakdown.

17.33 The Inquiry was pleased to hear that when workers have the resources to persist with young people there are some extraordinary success stories. The Youth Substance Abuse Service in Geelong (Victoria) provided an example of a young girl with whom it had worked:

*... she was on the street and had been under the bridges, you know, pulling her out from under the bridge chroming last year. Every day we tried to get her home and no one knew what was going on, and we told her about YSAS [Youth Substance Abuse Service] and after a while, she decided that yes, she did have a drug and alcohol problem. She went into YSAS, and from there they referred her on and decided she needed more.*

*... she was under 16 so there was nowhere in Geelong so it was rehab. She came home*



*from that and battled with her issues and continued with the support, and the long and short of it is that she came out about November I think last year. It was a real battle to hold her through Christmas. We did. YSAS offered her respite again to go back, because she was really battling but since then, in the meantime, she's got herself a ... job. She had to fight like hell to get back to school because the school did not want to know her, I promise you. Went to the Education Department and she's now been back for six weeks, and one of the main head people there who absolutely refused to have her on the place, is now saying it's a pleasure to have her. She is doing Year 8, Year 9. She's doing physics, chem, psychology, maths, English and graphics and starring on every single one.<sup>56</sup>*

## Mental health services

17.34 Witnesses to the Inquiry spoke and wrote about young people who are homeless and at risk of homelessness needing a range of mental health service responses. The range included services to meet the emotional needs of a population that has often experienced significant trauma<sup>57</sup>, services for young people with specific mental illnesses, services for those who have serious mental health problems that are not easy to define or diagnose; and services for young people with a number of concurrent problems.

17.35 Iona House, a young women's shelter in Townsville, spoke to the Inquiry about levels of self-harming behaviours in the young women the shelter supports:

*Seventy-five per cent of our young women who come to the shelters are self-harmers. We put strategies in place to help them work through that, but it would be really good to see some service where they can actually go and talk about those issues.<sup>58</sup>*

17.36 While the recent addition of new Medicare items for psychological and allied health services would, at first glance, seem to offer some help for homeless young people, initial indications are that as a general population young people under 25 have not been taking up these referral opportunities.<sup>59</sup> As discussed earlier in this chapter, there are a variety of reasons why homeless and at-risk young people have particular difficulties accessing GPs and they may therefore face additional barriers to benefiting from these new referral opportunities.

17.37 For many young homeless people, the trauma they have experienced or the poor state of their mental health means that they have service needs beyond the general practice level.

17.38 In many ways the evidence about the situation for young homeless and at-risk people with mental health problems closely paralleled, and intersected with, the evidence about the situation for those with substance abuse problems. Witnesses provided some examples of exemplary services, but the weight of evidence presented dealt with service gaps and the inappropriateness of mainstream services for young homeless people with mental health problems.<sup>60</sup>

17.39 What distinguished the evidence about mental health services was the level of creative thinking that appears to have taken place in the field, especially outside the major cities. Some of this appears to have arisen organically as members of communities



get together to find local solutions to their issues.<sup>61</sup> On the other hand some of it seemed to have been stimulated by the framework and funds provided under the new National Youth Mental Health Foundation, Headspace. It is far too early to make any statement about the potential effectiveness of Headspace, other than to note the fact that its existence has stimulated some new combinations of community consortia on the ground.<sup>62</sup>

17.40 Headspace made a submission to the Inquiry containing a number of criticisms of the current healthcare system's response to the mental health needs of at-risk and homeless young people. In particular, Headspace drew the Inquiry's attention to the problem of the division of services according to age, which sees 18 to 25 year-olds serviced by the Adult Mental Health Services instead of the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services, and questioned the accessibility, appropriateness and perceived friendliness of the current system.<sup>63</sup>

17.41 The Inquiry heard from other witnesses about a lack of adolescent-specific in-patient crisis services and residential rehabilitation services. Where adolescent-specific mental health crisis services didn't exist, young people in crisis could find themselves in general wards with adults.<sup>64</sup> Southern Youth and Family Services in Wollongong told the Commission that:

*...there are almost no residential youth mental health services, and certainly none in our area.*<sup>65</sup>

17.42 In Townsville, Child and Youth Mental Health Services told the Inquiry that without adolescent in-patient facilities young people have to be placed in the adult psychiatric ward or sent to Brisbane:

*We have to send them all down to South-East Queensland which as you can imagine is difficult and challenging for these young people because they have then disconnected from family and from their community.*<sup>66</sup>

17.43 Campbell Page, which runs a broad range of youth services on the South-West Coast of NSW, faced a similar problem:

*There is one crisis bed in the Eurobodalla Shire for people - and that's including adults - who have mental health services crisis issues. That's it. The closest psychiatric hospital is Goulburn and that's a very scary place for most of our young people to know they're going to ...*<sup>67</sup>

17.44 There also appeared to be a problem with homeless young people accessing mainstream adolescent specific mental health services. A SAAP worker in Bondi in NSW, located near the largest adolescent mental health service in NSW complained that:

*... the best response we get from mental health services to our adolescent residents who are in need is when there's been a crisis that has seen them delivered to the emergency ward by an ambulance. Then there will be a response.*<sup>68</sup>

17.45 In Tasmania, the Salvation Army had no issue with the quality of adolescent mental health services, but had trouble accessing them:

*One of the issues we found particularly in our women's services is the waiting list, the long waiting list to access some of those services, and the protocols around, often not having a parent assigned or a guardian assigned to actually take on some of that role that service might be prepared to do.*<sup>69</sup>

17.46 The witness went on to speak of waiting periods of up to six months. Complaints about waiting lists were echoed in Geelong in Victoria.<sup>70</sup> In Adelaide, the Inquiry was told about six to eight week waits even for young people with suicidal tendencies.<sup>71</sup>

17.47 The Inquiry was told about young people reaching out to mental health professionals for help. While mental health professionals often seemed well intentioned, they did not always appear to appreciate the complexity of the lives of the young people who presented. YWCA Darwin spoke about mental health professionals consistently underestimating a young woman's mental health problems:

*Recently, we have had ... an expectant mum who has tried to access mental services. The young [woman] had issues related to self-harm and was also threatening to harm others. She was severely depressed, and had previously sought mental health services in another state prior to coming back to Darwin. So, basically, [she] tried to access mental health services, went in, had an assessment and the assessment didn't go well, they said, "No, you're fine. You don't need to go on medication," and, you know, "We need to talk. We're not going to prescribe some medication", even though she needed that, as she may have harmed herself or others. So basically, [we] contacted on-call after hours, and didn't receive any support from the on-call team. Ended up going into accident and emergency department at the hospital. Still did not get the appropriate service that she wanted and left in tears, and there is a good side to this story. It was actually through a GP, through our system, we located a GP who was able to -- willing to prescribe some medication, some antidepressant medication, and she's doing well now and is very, very happy with the service that she got from the GP, and was really wanting to share her story today.*<sup>72</sup>

17.48 Where suitable, residential mental health services existed, the Inquiry heard that they do work effectively. Collins Place, a residential psychosocial rehabilitation service in Geelong (Victoria) described the nature of the service it provides:

*We have capacity for ten, five dual occupancy cottages here in Geelong West. The age range is 16 to 24. The criteria for admission is a diagnosed mental illness, case management and live in the region obviously. The young people stay with us for up to two years and the purpose of the program is to support people through their wellness with the idea of living independently post discharge.*<sup>73</sup>

## Embracing complexity

17.49 Services and young people repeatedly drew the Inquiry's attention to the necessity of facing up to and embracing the complex needs of individuals and the extreme difficulty of doing so in a divisive health system, where one aspect of health need is treated in isolation from another. Witnesses used phrases to describe young people's complexities such as high and complex needs and talked, not incorrectly, of the

prevalence of young people with co-morbidities and dual diagnoses. The Inquiry was told that young people are being denied healthcare services because they have more than one health problem.

17.50 In Hobart the Coordinator of Annie Kenney, a young women's refuge, voiced her frustration about dealing with single-focused healthcare services:

*... if you tell an agency this client has drug and alcohol issues, they'll want to know about mental health, and then vice versa, so it's sort of fighting from agency to agency to get that help ...*<sup>74</sup>

17.51 The Youth Substance Abuse Service in Geelong (Vic) spoke to the Inquiry about the complex needs of one young person who had been supported by the service. This young man was homeless, has drug problems, had a history of family trauma and out of home placement, suffers from extreme anxiety, and has a congenital spinal condition. YSAS talked about the challenge of finding the best approach when single-issue interventions fail to cope with complexity:

*That [case] is not uncommon, that is a really common sort of combination of factors. So that's the way we certainly look at it at YSAS from a social model and health perspective that takes into account lots of issues that are affecting young people and how they all combine through the young person's development to bring it to this place.*<sup>75</sup>

17.52 The Inquiry also received evidence that young people at the other end of the spectrum were missing out on services. While a young person's mental health problems might be serious enough to affect their ability to maintain accommodation, or even be accepted into a youth refuge, it may not be considered sufficiently serious to attract the help they need. One health worker told the Commission that:

*... a youngster might have a serious kind of functional problem, but if they don't have a ... disorder, schizophrenia or bipolar disorder, or be [in a] seriously life threatening situation, [but] they've got some sort of personality disorder, then they don't attract case management.*<sup>76</sup>

17.53 Mission Australia spoke of the need to deal pro-actively with complexity:

What works is actually understanding and being prepared to deal with the complexity of issues that impact on young people who are homeless or young people generally. So the education at the same time dealing with the housing, the health, the family, the drug and alcohol and mental health, particularly relevant that they are done together for homeless young people. The best practice internationally would say that intensive long-term support is required that is specifically targeted for young people.<sup>77</sup>

17.54 Mission Australia identified for the Inquiry several youth-based initiatives as examples of good practice. The organisation's own Triple Care Farm in New South Wales was nominated:

*Triple Care Farm is an holistic, residential alcohol and other drugs rehabilitation program for young people aged between 16 and 24 years. This specialist three-month program assists young people to address complex alcohol and other drug issues,*

*homelessness, mental illness, abuse and trauma, in a rural setting in the NSW Southern Highlands. The program offers individual and group counselling, case management support, accredited and non-accredited vocational training, music, arts and media programs and trade programs. The program also offers six months of aftercare support as programs participants re-enter the community. This after-care is a critical factor in the success of the program.*<sup>78</sup>

17.55 The Inquiry was also told about a number of services emerging from the new National Youth Mental Health Foundation, Headspace, which aims to develop new youth-friendly models for delivering mental health services to young people.<sup>79</sup> The Riverina Division of General Practice in NSW had received funding from Headspace to develop a community of youth service:

*It's more about having one approach to deal with youth in terms of their mental health, co-morbidities, homelessness, education and other things that are dealt with up to the age of 24. So what we've been doing is actually working on this idea around a community of youth service, and that means that youth are able to enter the service through any organisation that they would normally feel happy to access. However, once they are in the system, they are then able to move around within that system and get the help that they need and they would be case managed by the most appropriate provider who is the lead case manager.*<sup>80</sup>

## Regional, rural and remote healthcare

17.56 The challenge of providing healthcare services in rural, regional and remote Australia goes beyond the needs of homeless young people and young people at risk of homelessness, but the consequences of failing to meet that challenge weigh particularly heavily on this vulnerable section of the Australian community.

17.57 Witnesses from different parts of the country gave evidence about service gaps that ranged from not having any suitable services in a region to having under resourced services or an incomplete range of services. In Alice Springs, the Inquiry heard of psychiatric services only being available on a '... fly in fly out' basis.<sup>81</sup> The NSW Association for Adolescent Health told the Inquiry that '... the vast majority of regional and rural areas remain without a designated Youth Health Service'.<sup>82</sup> Southern Youth and Family Services, which is based in Wollongong in NSW, advised the Inquiry that there was no youth specialist drug and alcohol residential program in their area:

*... young people have to leave the area. The closest is Sydney or Canberra. Most young people do not complete the programs, at least in their first few admissions.*<sup>83</sup>

17.58 Earlier in this chapter, examples were given of young people being flown across state boundaries for drug and alcohol treatment because of a lack of services.

17.59 Services in regional, rural and remote areas sometimes work cooperatively to overcome the particular challenges they face. In Darwin, a school nurse told the Inquiry about Taminmin High School helping students to access mental health support by organising transport, using welfare staff to drive students to appointments or liaising

with other organisations to facilitate access.<sup>84</sup>

17.60 Aisbett, Boyd, Francis and Newnham surveyed a number of young rural people in Victoria and found that the lack of reliable transport to mental health services, the lack of qualified professionals within their own region who specialised in child and adolescent mental health, long waiting lists, the lack of after-hours services, and the negative impact of stigma and social exclusion all worked together to create barriers.<sup>85</sup> Co-location of mental health services with general health services was suggested as one way to reduce the stigma.

17.61 North East Support and Action for Youth, which services eight local government areas in north-east Victoria, told the Inquiry that youth health services should only be co-located with other youth services, as young rural people will not access general community health services for sensitive matters such as pregnancy, mental health support and substance use problems.<sup>86</sup>

17.62 In the context of the Aisbett, Boyd, Francis and Newnham findings, Dr Leanne Craze spoke at the Canberra hearings in support of the co-location concept.<sup>87</sup> She advised the Inquiry that in many towns:

- mental health services are unsustainable in terms of services for adults, let alone young people;
- health teams have impossible caseloads and are highly visible in the community;
- burnout is high and expectations are unrealistic.

Dr Craze voiced her concerns about the provision of fly-in or drive-in services as a solution and instead advocated for better support for local community members struggling to complete training in allied health fields and community sector work.

17.63 Dr Craze voiced doubts about whether comprehensive mental health services could ever be established across all rural and remote areas of Australia and advocated investigating creative alternatives. She drew the Inquiry's attention to a concept for rural and remote regions that is similar to the new Personal Helpers and Mentors Program under the COAG National Action Plan on Mental Health (where people from a range of backgrounds are employed to support people with severe functional limitations resulting from severe mental illness).<sup>88</sup> The idea Dr Craze raised involves developing regional field education support networks aimed at building an alternative rural mental health workforce. Dr Craze described the two-fold approach the network would require. The first involves identifying existing national policy initiatives that require support workers; identifying the rural areas where these programs are entering; identifying appropriate courses and training providers for these rural support workers; and asking those providers to undertake an audit of field placements, including identifying any placement problems. The second involves providing better student support through locating, pro-actively developing, and supporting placements and student supervision; negotiating secondments and position transfers to facilitate the take-up of placements; and brokering for targeted training areas.<sup>89</sup>

*The difference that that would make ... and I say it quite seriously, that I actually think that positions like those [involving skilled up locals], a workforce like that, in rural*

*towns, would actually make the difference between a young person seeking treatment and staying engaged in treatment and also it would make the difference between a mental health professional not quitting, because it would take a significant load off mental health professionals.*<sup>90</sup>

## Findings and Recommendations

17.64 Young homeless and at-risk people require access to specialist or youth specific healthcare services, including dental care, that respond to local conditions, such as those funded by the IHSY program. Even if the debate about ‘youth specific’ and generalist health services continues, there should be no controversy about the proven value of the kind of services provided under IHSY. Both community sector and government stakeholders told the NYC that the program is insufficiently funded. IHSY is another example where a pilot program has yielded some highly effective and innovative service models, and yet success was not implemented more broadly. The Perth mobile clinic was supported as a flexible youth specific health service that could visit different locations more accessible for young people. This type of initiative could well be developed in other capital cities. In the context of a redevelopment of IHSY, the scope of the program could be broadened somewhat, but the key issue is developing capacity to more adequately respond to expressed and real need.

### Recommendation 17.1:

**The NYC Inquiry recommends that the Innovative Health Services for Homeless Youth (IHSY) program be continued and further developed as an important component of a national homelessness service system in order to provide more and better health services for at-risk, disadvantaged and homeless young Australians.**

17.65 Mainstream antenatal, postnatal and parenting services are not suitable for pregnant and parenting youth. The evidence of how well the Adolescent Mothers Support Service is working is encouraging as is having an outreach capacity to contact and work with this group.

### Recommendation 17.2:

**The NYC Inquiry recommends that flexible, non-judgemental ante-natal and post-natal outreach based support services be implemented in major population centres for pregnant and parenting young women.**

17.66 The criteria to access disability behavioural support programs can be difficult for young disabled homeless people to meet.

17.67 There are widespread gaps in the provision of non-area based, adolescent specific, drug and alcohol services, including: early intervention, residential detoxification, post-detoxification respite, residential rehabilitation, and post-rehabilitation supported housing. There are links between homelessness and drug and alcohol issues as well as mental health; however, by no means are all young people who experience mental illness, or have drug and alcohol problems, homeless. For homeless young people who do have such problems getting the help they need is particularly difficult as specialist services often cannot provide accommodation or accommodation services cannot cope with a

young person who is psychotic or has a hard drug habit. While it can be argued that some young people successfully access mainstream services, for highly marginalised youth, this continues to be problematic. The provision of both mental health and drug and alcohol services is uneven around Australia and the level of service provision needs to be addressed for young people generally. The Victorian Youth Substance Abuse Service stands out as an example of consolidated service capacity with near to full state coverage. Victoria was spending \$15-16 million on youth drug and alcohol services and probably could reach state-wide capacity as well as provide a substantial amount of outreach for a total of \$20 million at current levels of need. A fully developed national network could cost close to \$100 million per year of which a significant part is already in government program budgets. For homeless youth, in particular, new combinations of services and new models and more effective linkages between programs and sectors are required to create a system that works more effectively for this group.

**Recommendation 17.3:**

**The NYC Inquiry recommends that a national network of youth substance abuse services be established across all jurisdictions to provide an appropriate range of services that are sufficiently funded to meet current levels of need.**

17.68 There are gaps in the provision of adolescent-specific and youth-specific mental health services, emergency mental health services and residential rehabilitation services. An argument was strongly put by Headspace that young people need particular attention given mainstream services are often perceived as ‘unfriendly’ or not understanding of young people. For homeless young people experiencing mental health issues, the issue of stable accommodation and appropriate support is critical. Treatments and therapies presume that everyday stresses are relatively stabilised and that a young person can concentrate on working through their mental health issues. Overall, some \$4 billion over five years underpins the National Action Plan on Mental Health with a range of initiatives<sup>91</sup>. A question can be raised about the extent to which the needs of young people are addressed and within that the extent to which appropriate responses have been funded that will impact on the lives of homeless young people.

**Recommendation 17.4:**

**The NYC Inquiry recommends that all jurisdictions review the provision of mental health services for young people in terms of access, service gaps, wait times and operational efficiency in order to adequately resource support programs for young people with mental health issues and their families.**

17.69 Many young homeless and at-risk people present with a constellation of health problems that need to be addressed at the same time, and effective models appropriate for homeless and marginalised youth have been developed but not extended nationally over the past 20 years. The experience of the Innovative Health Service for Homeless Youth is particularly instructive.

**Recommendation 17.5:**

**The NYC Inquiry recommends that new models of residential programs be developed and funded which enable drug and alcohol, youth mental health and supported accommodation services to work in partnership to support homeless young people with a dual diagnosis.**



17.70 Homeless and at-risk young people in rural, regional and remote communities experience additional disadvantage in relation to access to healthcare.

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# 18

The perception of street-frequenting homeless youth as a threat is a misconception derived from their visibility and their sometimes loud and boisterous behaviour in public spaces. Homeless young people are often the victims of crime rather than the perpetrators. But trapped in chronic homelessness and without stable accommodation for long periods of time, these young people end up engaging in petty crime – public transport fare evasion, offensive language, failure to obey a police order to move on, shop-lifting etc – to survive. The penalties levelled at homeless young for transport fare evasion create conflict and make a homeless young people's situation even worse. The relationship between homeless youth and police, was uneven. In some places it was a source of conflict and antagonism, while in other places there have been programs to improve policing on the streets. However, the situation for homeless young people is ripe for escalation and conflict. Street youth, in particular, face greater discrimination from landlords and other businesses because of the way they present and the stigma of being homeless. If homelessness continues, then the chances of legal complications increase, raising a concern about the inadequate support for young people in these situations.



## Chapter 18 | Crime and Legal Issues

*I ran away from home due to violence and then entered a community [that] revolved around violence .... I experienced all sorts of things including drug dependency, criminal acts and shop theft.<sup>1</sup>*

### Introduction

18.1 There is a perception of young homeless people in street settings as gang members or drug addicts, which leads some people to fear them. Also, more generally, young people tend to gather in groups and are often loud and boisterous. This behaviour may make other people in the community feel anxious or threatened. Governments have responded to these putative perceptions by introducing laws that regulate public space and provide police with powers to tell people to 'move on' if they are believed to be causing a nuisance or anxiety to others. Relationships between young people and the police deteriorate when these laws are over-used or abused.

18.2 Homeless young people are often the victims crime and discrimination. Sometimes the crime is the reason a young person becomes homeless especially in the case of child sexual or physical abuse. Homeless people suffer from discrimination and are often refused goods and services on the grounds that they are homeless. Indigenous young people, migrants and refugees suffer additional racial discrimination and prejudice.

18.3 For those young people sleeping rough and living on the street, crime is seen as necessary for survival and a means to an income. It is certainly part of the sub-culture of street living. Common crimes committed by homeless young people include public transport fare evasion, offensive language, and failure to obey a police order to move on. 'Survival crimes' include shop-stealing, bag-snatching and breaking and entering.

18.4 This chapter considers homeless young people as both the perpetrators and victims of crime, the criminalisation of homelessness, and the relationship between homeless young people and police. Discrimination against homeless young people is also discussed.

## Homeless young people as the victims of crime

18.5 Young people are more likely to be the victims of crime than their older counterparts. The Australian Bureau of Statistics reported that:

*More than 45 per cent (6,674 people) of victims of robbery were aged 15–24 years, followed by those aged 25–34 years at 20 per cent (2,953 people).<sup>2</sup>*

18.6 Some witnesses to the Inquiry confirmed that homeless young people are often the victims of crime. For example, a witness from Shopfront Youth Legal Centre told the Inquiry that:

*... most of our clients are victims of very serious crimes well before they become offenders.<sup>3</sup>*

18.7 The Inquiry was told in many places that the crimes of sexual and physical abuse against children were often the reason young people became homeless in the first place.<sup>4</sup> Homeless young people living on the street are exposed to high levels of crime especially violent crime<sup>5</sup> and this crime is less likely to be reported to police.

18.8 Young people told the Inquiry that they do not feel safe alone living on the streets and so tend to gather in groups for better protection.<sup>6</sup> One young woman told the Inquiry of her terrible experience alone at night:

*One of the worst things that happened would have to have been one night when I was sleeping on a park bench and got surrounded by this gang of guys that tried to rape me. It was only by chance that a friend of mind came by and helped me get away. Since that night I couldn't sleep outside without a horrible fear.<sup>7</sup>*

18.9 As the victims of crime, young people can come into contact with the police but their experiences are not always positive. A witness from Shopfront Youth Legal Centre (NSW), when asked about how the police would respond to a homeless young woman reporting a sexual assault, told the Inquiry that the police response depends on:

*... which police station it is and who the individual police officers are. Some of them are absolutely fantastic. They can't do enough. Others are not particularly interested and drag their feet on the investigation particularly if the young person is known to them as an offender or as a sex worker or, you know, somebody who may not be the police's idea of a model citizen. The police will give them short shrift and not really assist them. I think there is a perception of course that if a young person is homeless, if she's reporting a sexual assault she'll have disappeared by next week, so it's a waste of time taking a statement, because they're never going to be able to properly investigate it ...<sup>8</sup>*

18.10 On the other hand, this witness told the Inquiry:

*We have really come across some fantastic police officers who will work really, really hard, to assist victims of crime when they are homeless young people.<sup>9</sup>*

## Homelessness young people as the perpetrators of crime

18.11 The Burdekin Inquiry reported research that homeless young people engaged in various crimes to supplement their income or avoid expenses, from robbery with vio-

lence to public transport fare evasion.<sup>10</sup> The evidence presented to the Burdekin Inquiry considered that most crimes committed by homeless young people were for economic reasons.

18.12 In a review of literature, the National Crime Prevention section of the Australian Attorney-General's Department cited research suggesting that economic reasons were the most common reasons for criminal behaviour amongst homeless young people.<sup>11</sup> Homeless young people can slip into a sub-culture of crime and homelessness where the techniques of crime are taught and the values and beliefs that it is acceptable are reinforced.<sup>12</sup>

18.13 The evidence presented to 2007 Inquiry suggested economic needs are still important reasons for homeless young people to commit crimes. These were referred to as 'survival crimes' and include shoplifting and fraud.<sup>13</sup> It was also suggested to the Inquiry that mental illness and drugs and alcohol are significant factors in criminal behaviour.<sup>14</sup>

### *The criminalisation of homelessness*

18.14 There can be no doubt that a small proportion of homeless young people commit crimes for economic and other reasons. However, of greater concern to people presenting evidence to the Inquiry were the laws and police powers that make criminals of young people for the normal behaviour associated with being homeless. The term 'criminalisation of homelessness' was used by workers from the PILCH Homeless Persons' Legal Clinic (Victoria) to refer to the range of issues that cause homeless young people to come into contact with the police and justice system. The punitive impact of many laws on these young people can lead to a 'downward spiral' that heightens the negative consequences of homelessness. The Inquiry was told that:

*Without secure accommodation, behaviour that would otherwise be routine in the home can suddenly become unlawful. By definition, somebody who is homeless doesn't have the opportunity to comply with some laws that prohibit conduct like begging, sleeping, drinking, conducting affairs in a public space.*<sup>15</sup>

18.15 A result of the accumulation of offences brought against homeless young people '... is borne out in a disproportionate representation of young people in the infringements and criminal justice systems.'<sup>16</sup> For example, homeless young people are vulnerable to accumulating large amounts of unpaid fines that can lead to the issue of arrest warrants and, potentially, incarceration. In Queensland, the Inquiry was told that begging is an offence for which the maximum penalty is currently a \$750 fine or six months in custody.<sup>17</sup> Although it is unlikely that a homeless young person will receive the maximum period in custody, it is foreseeable that a magistrate may incarcerate someone with unpaid fines and a lengthy criminal history of low-level offences such as begging.<sup>18</sup>

### *Public space issues*

18.16 While witnesses throughout Australia raised the use of public space by young homeless people, it received emphasis at the hearings in Perth and Brisbane. Queensland Public Interest Law Clearing House, QPILCH, told the Inquiry certain laws that govern public space:

*... criminalise behaviour of young people such that they cannot actively participate in*

society...<sup>19</sup>

18.17 In Queensland, the Summary Offences Act (2005) and the 'move-on' laws under the Police Powers and Responsibilities Act (2000) were cited as legislation used to charge homeless young people. QPILCH suggested that the offence of 'public nuisance' was a catchall used to charge young people who have not otherwise committed an offence.<sup>20</sup> The impact of Queensland police move-on powers is to criminalise behaviour by homeless young people, that is unavoidable. The Inquiry was told that:

*The move-on direction empowers police to direct the person to leave the place and not return for up to 24 hours, or to move away from a location for reasonable distance in a stated direction for up to 24 hours. The police officer must also give the person or group their reasons for giving the direction.*

*Receiving a move-on direction is not an offence in itself, however contravening the direction is. The maximum fine for contravening a move-on direction is \$3,000. There is no statutory defence. If a person contravenes the direction and believes the move-on direction is itself unlawful, the only way a person can contest the fine is by defending it in court.*<sup>21</sup>

18.18 Anglicare WA suggested that there was a culture of policing and monitoring in Perth.

*Within inner city Perth for example,*

*The area is heavily policed (police are present on foot, horseback, bicycle, car, wagon and remotely by camera)*

*It is monitored by extensive use of CCTV cameras ('manned' 24 hours per day).*

*Move-on notices (banning for 24 hour periods) are frequently applied to "undesirables".*

*A curfew applies in the Northbridge area for young people at night.*

*The area is also monitored by private security, local government security officers, transit police and transit guards.*<sup>22</sup>

18.19 In the Northern Territory, under the Summary Offences Act (NT), young people can be prevented from re-entering a designated area for up to 72 hours by the issue of a 'loitering notice'.<sup>23</sup> If a person does not leave or is caught in the designated area within the period they can be charged with a criminal offence<sup>24</sup>. The manager of Alice Springs Youth Accommodation and Support Service told the Inquiry of a recent incident where young people who had jobs as trolley collectors were issued with loitering notices that prevented them from working.<sup>25</sup>

18.20 The impact of laws that limit access to public space is to further marginalise homeless young people both from their peers and support networks including services. In Perth, the Inquiry was told how the use of these laws by police disrupted homeless young people trying to meet and connect with each other:

*There is one particular inner city area where homeless young people congregate to meet each other to support each to socialise. That's their social world, and the police have explicitly and consciously said we're trying to get rid of them from that area...*<sup>26</sup>



18.21 In a combined submission QPILCH and a number of other key Queensland services told the Inquiry of a research report that highlighted the detrimental effect of the move-on powers:

*They convey a powerful a message of social exclusion and cause homeless young people to feel further disengaged and alienated from society. A move-on direction can also prevent young people from accessing support services or attending appointments. In Brisbane, it is common for homeless support services, which provide food, clothing, information and counselling, to operate in or near public spaces. A good example is the Red Cross Youth Night Café, which is located adjacent to King George Square.<sup>27</sup>*

18.22 It appears that there are significant unintended consequences to the regulation of public space, including preventing homeless people from accessing services and employment, as well as the criminalisation of homelessness.

### *Public transport fines*

18.23 Young homeless people need public transport to attend school, find work, access services and maintain connections with their community but are prevented from and punished for doing so because of their inability to pay. The Inquiry was told that:

*Accessible and affordable public transport is vital for all young people. This need is even greater for homeless young people, who are unlikely to have other transport options.<sup>28</sup>*

18.24 The PILCH Homeless Persons' Legal Clinic (Victoria) explained the conundrum facing young homeless people who need to travel on public transport, whether to access services or to maintain community connections, who do not have the resources to pay for that travel:

*We have ... found that for young people, access to local services and connection with the local community is especially important. They tend to feel a greater need to be connected to the community, and in that sense if they can't travel to the people they need to and travel to and from services to access those services, then they are particularly marginalised.<sup>29</sup>*

However:

*They simply don't have the money and they cannot afford to buy the tickets.<sup>30</sup>*

18.25 Driving is not an option either. Apart from the cost of purchasing and running a car, homeless young people also face the barrier of gaining and retaining a licence:

*Measures ostensibly introduced to improve road safety have made it increasingly difficult for young people to get and keep their licence. Even a minor speeding offence now results in an automatic suspension for drivers on P1 provisional licences. Outstanding fines (which often have nothing to do with traffic offences) can also result in licence suspension or ineligibility.<sup>31</sup>*

18.26 This problem is exacerbated for young people who live in country areas where available support services are limited to regional centres. These young people need to use public transport to travel to regional centres to access the support they need because:

*They have no other way of getting around. I guess they face the option of not accessing*

*services or running the risk of getting a fine, and either outcome is not really ideal ... We don't want them to avoid services for the sake of avoiding fines.*<sup>32</sup>

18.27 The level of surveillance by transport officials means that homeless young people are more than likely to get caught riding public transport without a ticket and the punishment is an on-the-spot fine. However, the issue of fines is no disincentive because there is no alternative and:

*... if they do incur fines, it is almost impossible for these people to pay the fines. They escalate and tend to go through the court system ... [and] people end up with thousands of dollars worth of fines.*<sup>33</sup>

18.28 Community legal centres, like the PILCH Homeless Persons' Legal Clinic, can offer only limited help in these circumstances:

*If they make their way to a community legal centre it is possible for us to sometimes get those fines revoked, but it may take years before that happens ...*<sup>34</sup>

### *Court diversion options*

18.29 In Queensland, some attempt has been made to avoid the negative consequences associated with the criminal justice system. In order to divert homeless people charged with minor offences, especially around public space issues, the Queensland Government established the Homeless Persons Court Diversion Program as part of the Responding to Homelessness Strategy.<sup>35</sup> Under the program, a court liaison officer works with legal representatives and the prosecutor to find appropriate services in the community. However, while generally supportive of the program, QPILCH told the Inquiry that:

*There aren't support services to divert people to. So a diversionary initiative that doesn't fit with structural services because of the systemic failure in terms of affordable housing and crisis accommodation services is never going to work.*<sup>36</sup>

18.30 Other jurisdictions do not have specific court diversion programs for homeless people as in Queensland. However, most jurisdictions have diversion programs for criminal acts related to alcohol and drug abuse and some have programs for people with mental illness.

18.31 In NSW, the Young Offenders Act (1997) permits the use of cautions and warnings by police and youth justice conferencing for young people who have committed non-violent offences.

18.32 Diversion options for homeless people, such as in Queensland, would mitigate the negative consequences of legislation that 'criminalises' homeless people, in particular the public space laws. Diversion is a much better option because the impact of even a minor conviction recorded against a homeless young person can be significant. A conviction makes finding a job more difficult and limits access to housing.<sup>37</sup> QPILCH and a number of key Queensland services advised the Inquiry that it is:

*... grossly unfair to mark a person's criminal record permanently because they have committed 'crimes' due to their homelessness.*<sup>38</sup>

### *Sentencing options*

18.33 Once a young person appears before a magistrate and is convicted there are usually a range of sentencing options available. In many instances the magistrate could order a good behaviour bond or probation order. QPILCH told the Inquiry that in their experience:

*... the vast majority of young homeless defendants receive a monetary fine (in the vicinity of \$200 for public nuisance) and usually a conviction for a low level public space charge.<sup>39</sup>*

18.34 Since homeless young people usually have limited income they are unable to pay these fines, which accumulate. QPILCH told the Inquiry it was not uncommon for their clients to have accumulated fines in excess of \$2,000. In some jurisdictions it is possible for the fine collection agency to waive the fine.

### **Relationship between homeless young people and police**

18.35 Many homeless young people are antagonistic towards the police, particularly those young people who are sleeping rough. One young person told the Inquiry that:

*I hated police and I had no respect for them whatsoever.<sup>40</sup>*

18.36 Homeless young people believe that police treat them unfairly and sometimes accuse them of committing offences without any grounds for doing so. One homeless young person told the Inquiry:

*I'm sleeping out at the moment. Oh, you're looked down on and pinched for whatever happens, because you've got nothing better to do with your time. For example, six or seven weeks ago me and my mates were sitting in the Queen Street Mall. We were just hanging out, bored, watching people walk past, making funny comments and what have you, having fun and that and the police had come over harassed us, telling us that we had stolen a camera from somebody up at Central Station which if you don't know yourself is a twenty minute walk, round figure and we got told we'd done it and we got harassed and it got blamed on us.<sup>41</sup>*

18.37 A witness from Youth Drug and Alcohol Service (Sydney West Area Health Services) told the Inquiry that:

*... our young people, by the nature of what they do, they're anti-police because they're breaking the law nine times out of ten. They don't have money. They don't have anywhere to live. They don't have any sense of safety, so every time they get up, they're breaking the law, so naturally they're antagonistic towards the police.<sup>42</sup>*

18.38 This witness went on to say that while his clients believe police harass them all the time, the attitude of police towards homeless young people was often negative:

*If I spoke to the police they would tell you my clients are horrible, and are always making trouble.<sup>43</sup>*

18.39 This was a fairly natural reaction but leads to an ongoing cycle of poor attitudes and relationships because:

*When someone is antagonistic towards you, you get antagonistic back and so it's an ongoing conflict.*<sup>44</sup>

18.40 The Inquiry was told that police target certain groups, particularly Indigenous young people. For example in Townsville the Inquiry was told that where groups of Indigenous young people congregate the police:

*... sit on the corner in the police car, just waiting for a bunch of youths to walk up the streets ... And then they're searching them and asking them questions.*<sup>45</sup>

18.41 Not all police have a negative attitude and many go out of their way to assist homeless young people. A witness spoke highly of one officer:

*We have one particular officer who works within Parramatta who is just amazing. Like he actually brings kids out to us, you know, and he works with the transit police there. He's doing a fabulous job.*<sup>46</sup>

18.42 A young person in Brisbane also told the Inquiry of some police who:

*... understand we're down in the dumps so don't harass us and just do their job, 'what's your name, are you doing all right', and get into court and making sure everything is okay and then leave us alone.*<sup>47</sup>

18.43 The Inquiry was given examples of where actions by police officers had improved the relationship between homeless young people and police by encouraging interaction in non-legal settings. A witness from Open Family Australia (Vic) spoke of an officer from Sunshine Police who operates a:

*... street surfer bus ... in the western suburbs [and who] has a remarkable relationship with young people, by taking his bus to where they hang out, to let them know he is a police officer but he's not acting as a police officer. He's built up a great rapport with a whole range of different groups of young people, a whole range of different cultural groups of young people, and I think he's managed to do that because he's gone out and being himself, and shown the human side of policing.*<sup>48</sup>

18.44 A homeless young person related a story of how an outreach program changed his attitude towards the police:

*I was introduced to a program in the Valley, an Information Outreach Service in the Valley they put in place to minimise sniffing in the city. They put a program in the Valley and I've done that for almost 18 months now and it's totally changed my perspective of the police, because the cops there at the drumming showed us so much respect and judgement or anything like that. It was a drumming program. The police drum band ...*

*To walk into the drumming the first day and the police there and they said what we were going to do and we were going to march in Australia Day and I just laughed out loud and I said you're joking mate, I'm never going to march along with coppers mate, like you're kidding ...*

*I've now performed like twenty odd times and gone out to their property and rehearsed the music and stuff.*<sup>49</sup>

18.45 Homeless young people and police come into contact for a number of reasons and their relationship will depend on a number of factors. Where police frequently use their move-on powers the relationship seems to be more strained than in other places. To improve the relationship police should seek to establish contact in non-legal settings.

## Discrimination

18.46 Discrimination against young people is common. Young people suffer discrimination in the private rental accommodation market and in accessing essential services. Indigenous young people, people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, and young parents suffer additional discrimination. Discrimination against homeless young people also occurs.

18.47 The Inquiry was told that young people generally are discriminated against in the private rental market. The Tasmanian Government submission stated that:

*Young people can be subject to significant discrimination in the private rental market, in the form of denial of access, variations of terms and conditions of tenancy, and false assumptions about capacity to pay, lack of references and lack of rental history. Young people and sole parents are the least preferred tenants for real estate agents and landlords.*<sup>50</sup>

18.48 The Inquiry also heard that racism and discrimination against Indigenous young people and young people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds by real estate agents and landlords was not uncommon. As a result young people were denied accommodation or were forced to accept unsatisfactory housing. The Refugee Youth Issues Network of South Australia related the story of a young woman from Tanzania who:

*... was told by a landlord that "you seem like a nice girl but we don't want trouble here" when applying for a property in Magill so she could be closer to her university.*<sup>51</sup>

18.49 This young woman felt that the landlord did not understand that she had the financial capacity to pay the rent and that she wanted to be close to her place of study. She felt:

*... like she was categorised as a troublemaker or having trouble making friends because she had black skin.*<sup>52</sup>

18.50 Young parents are often assumed to be irresponsible or poor parents by many people and suffer discrimination as a result. A young mother in Brisbane related her experience of negative attitudes towards her when using public transport:

*I went to get on a bus and the bus driver stopped and opened the door and he saw my son and he goes, oh, I don't want to put up with a screaming kid, and closed the door and drove off. It's happened to me a few times. I was sitting on the bus and my son has this little elephant and it sings in the jungle and you've got like, you know, your teenagers at the back swearing their heads off loud as, and he's got this little toy that sings a song, and the bus driver says oh, can you shut it off. ... I had a go at him. I was like you know there's people up there swearing their heads off and you're having a little go at my little son because he wants to play with a little toy. You know, it just really makes me*

*angry. It's just really rude and like even trains. At peak hour, you have to like squeeze in through the door to get on there. There was one door and nobody standing in the doorway so I had my son in his pram and I was like there and the dude in the middle of the train that blows his whistle, he saw me run past him to get into the train and just as I ran past him to get into the door, he blew his whistle for the door to close and I had to wait again. It's just really rude.*<sup>53</sup>

18.51 Her housing worker compared this to her own experience:

*As my experience of a mother with a two-year-old - and I'm in my thirties - no one would dare question me on the bus of what my child was playing with or would dare close the bus door on me and say no, you can't come in here. If my child was screaming they would quietly look away. However, the expectation is that someone who is parenting early in life is not a responsible parent or isn't looking after the children to a standard. It's just abhorrent.*<sup>54</sup>

18.52 The PILCH Homeless Person's Legal Clinic (Victoria) undertook a survey of its clients and found that 70 per cent had suffered from some form of discrimination on the grounds of homelessness or in relation to their accommodation status and told of discrimination against homeless people.<sup>55</sup> A witness from the clinic gave a typical example of discrimination against a homeless person:

*Someone will turn up to a crisis accommodation centre and there won't be a bed for the night ... and they'll get a cheque from the crisis accommodation to go to a backpackers. The backpackers will see the cheque and say sorry, we don't accept cheques from the Salvation Army or from that service, so the person is turned away, or if it's more subtle, will go to places and get the worst room with the worst services. At a caravan park they will get the one down the back with no gas bottle or something like that.*<sup>56</sup>

18.53 This survey also found a similar situation in relation to goods and services:

*... about 60 per cent experienced discrimination in goods and services. Most often it's basic services like restaurants, cafes, bars but also essential services like banks, shops, health and hospitals. Reports of people being denied stitches because of the way they present and the way they are perceived by the different staff.*<sup>57</sup>

18.54 The PILCH Homeless Person's Legal Clinic looked for legal remedies but pointed out that:

*In Victoria, the Equal Opportunity Act is the prime instrument that prevents or makes discrimination unlawful and the grounds that it protects includes things such as age, sex, race, disability, political belief and applies to areas of activity which include education, accommodation, employment and provision of goods and services. But that Act doesn't protect [on the] grounds of homelessness or social status. So it is lawful to discriminate against somebody because they are homeless, or to discriminate against somebody because they receive social security benefits or [are] from a particular socio-economic background.*<sup>58</sup>

## Juvenile justice issues

### *Bail for homeless young people*

18.55 Homeless young people charged with even a minor offence are often refused bail and kept in custody. A witness from Shopfront Youth Legal Centre (NSW) told the Inquiry that young people are refused bail because there is no adequate accommodation available:

*You've got kids who are being refused bail because there is no adequate accommodation available, and eventually they will be granted bail. They are usually granted bail to reside as approved by the Department of Juvenile Justice or the Department of Community Services. Somebody will eventually find them some accommodation, but it could take days or even weeks of them being held on remand pending some appropriate accommodation.*<sup>59</sup>

18.56 The Bridge Youth Service (NSW) told the Inquiry that the service received a number of referrals from young people held in detention:

*I would say most of the referrals that I would get are from Juvenile Justice and young people calling up from lock-up because they're being held and because they don't have any accommodation to go to. Definitely from our service, getting referrals from and on behalf of young people is because they've got no accommodation.*<sup>60</sup>

18.57 Even when granted bail homeless young people can have a lot of difficulty meeting their bail conditions and when caught are remanded into custody.<sup>61</sup> Service to Youth Council (SA) provided an example where young people:

*... have been picked up by the police and had been bailed to a particular address. It may be an accommodation service they are no longer staying at and then try and get taken back there, and they find out they are no longer bailed there, no longer staying there and can get arrested again and will be remanded because they breached their bail.*<sup>62</sup>

18.58 In some places alternative accommodations arrangements may be found that prevent homeless young people being held in remand. The Inquiry was told of the Remand Intensive Neighbourhood Care Program (Remand INC) in South Australia, which is a community-based accommodation program for young people facing remand into custody and thereby limits their exposure to the justice system,<sup>63</sup> although the witness felt the program was not very successful.

18.59 Bail hostels are another model for diverting young people from remand, particularly for Indigenous young people. The Inquiry is aware these exist in NSW funded by the NSW Department of Juvenile Justice. In Adelaide, Metropolitan Aboriginal Youth and Family Services told the Inquiry that a bail hostel was:

*... definitely what we need for young Aboriginal people.*<sup>64</sup>

### *Post-release support*

18.60 Across Australia the Inquiry was told that young people leaving detention, either juvenile detention centres or adult correction centres, at the completion of their



sentence or on parole are often released without adequate support. In Queensland, the Inquiry was told that young people leaving adult correctional facilities:

*... are released without any money, without any support, without any sort of community organisation that has had any relationship.*<sup>65</sup>

18.61 Young adults from rural Queensland are not returned home when released from detention. Without any money or support these young people are:

*... wandering around, and then they end up going [back to detention], repeating that cycle again.*<sup>66</sup>

18.62 Leaving detention without any support leads either to re-incarceration or reliance on homelessness services such as SAAP. Post-release support services should be in place to assist people leaving detention to secure accommodation, work and links to community support services to prevent a return to detention or homelessness.

18.63 The Inquiry was told that the Queensland juvenile justice system does have a post-release program but it is detention centre based not community based, which means the program maintains:

*... the connection with the system, with the same prison officers, whatever you want to call them, and so when the young person is released they will go and visit them in the community and they call that post release, which to us is basically a recipe for attracting them back inside the system, maintaining a relationship.*<sup>67</sup>

18.64 In NSW, the juvenile justice system does have a community based post-release support program but the Inquiry was told that funding should be increased and additional services provided.<sup>68</sup>

18.65 In some jurisdictions, the Inquiry heard of plans to develop post-release support programs aimed at preventing young people returning to detention. The Tasmanian Government told the Inquiry that:

*Youth Justice staff are currently designing a step down program to support young people following release from Ashley [youth detention centre]. This program is intended to meet the need for long-term accommodation options supported by coordinated programs to help in establishing young people back into the community.*<sup>69</sup>

18.66 The ACT was developing:

*... a transitional housing program for young people who are coming out of Quamby, our youth detention centre.*<sup>70</sup>

18.67 In South Australia, the lack of post-release support meant that young people leaving detention are reliant on the SAAP system. The Inquiry was told that:

*SAAP [services] do not hold specialist knowledge or models of therapeutic intervention to deliver the case management services to these young people. Some young people may have limited access to accommodation due to service concerns about the nature of their offences.*<sup>71</sup>

18.68 Service to Youth Council (SA) told the Inquiry that:



*Specialist stable and affordable accommodation should be made available for young people who are exiting the Juvenile Justice system. This would ensure that there is appropriate accommodation available for young people at the time of release as well as making this accommodation more stable, reducing the need for them to move frequently. This would also allow more young people to be remanded for shorter periods and to complete their sentence in the community.*<sup>72</sup>

## Findings and Recommendations

18.69 The criminalisation of homelessness through public space laws is counter-productive to ameliorating homelessness. There is little point in moving homeless people from one location to another with public space laws. The move-on laws in Western Australia are a poor example of how to deal with young people in public spaces. New solutions are needed to assist homeless people to access services and reduce their need to congregate in public spaces.

### Recommendation 18.1:

**The NYC Inquiry recommends that state and territory jurisdictions convene a review of the various laws that apply to behaviour in public space and how these laws affect young people, especially homeless young people.**

18.70 This inquiry has established that policing as it affects homeless young people has improved since 1989. However, the relationship between police and young people, particularly homeless young people, remains an on-going issue that requires some attention in the training and routine briefings of police officers. Establishing contact and undertaking community policing activities in non-legal community settings could further improve the relationship. This would contribute to crime prevention by not only helping to reduce criminal activity among the homeless youth population, but also it would assist in the reporting and solving of crimes conducted against homeless young people.

### Recommendation 18.2

**The NYC Inquiry recommends that youth and police community liaison committees be given a role to monitor issues between young people in public spaces and police and how policing practices impact on young people.**

18.71 The criminal justice system should avoid placing young people on remand because they are homeless. The Burdekin Report urged that legislation ‘establish a presumption in favour of bail for children where this is not already the case’. The issue is still present and alternative approaches, such as the use of bail hostels or other non-custodial community settings, need to be developed further.

### Recommendation 18.3:

**The NYC Inquiry recommends that state and territory jurisdictions extend diversionary practices that prevent homeless young people being placed on remand in custody because they cannot afford bail.**

#### **Recommendation 18.4:**

**The NYC Inquiry recommends that state and territory jurisdictions give particular attention to diversionary practices to prevent Indigenous young people being placed on remand in custody.**

18.72 There was recurrent mention of the problems that unemployed and homeless young people have using public transport, where they are apprehended for travelling without a ticket, experience a punitive and often unsympathetic interaction with a transport policeman and then incur mounting fines they can't pay with subsequent legal action. On-the-spot fines for public transport fare evasion are a counter-productive measure when homeless young people are incapable of paying the fines and need to move from place to place to access services. Avoidance of the authorities because of these unpaid fines further exacerbates the marginalisation of homeless young people. The issuing of a 'youth card' similar to a seniors card would have a series of positive benefits for young people but also reduce administrative follow-up and subsequent legal proceedings.

#### **Recommendation 18.5:**

**The NYC Inquiry recommends that Centrelink issue a means tested 'youth card', which would carry certain entitlements such as free or concession fares on public transport, as a way of reducing fines and punitive outcomes.**

18.73 Post-release support programs that provide young people with assistance in maintaining their place in the community after completing their sentence are critical to avoid both homelessness and a return to criminal activity and detention.

#### **Recommendation 18.6:**

**The NYC Inquiry recommends that stronger post-release programs be put in place for young people leaving juvenile justice or adult correctional facilities to prevent an offender becoming homeless after release. Such programs should involve:**

- Case management support;
- Brokerage funds;
- Accommodation;
- Follow-up for at least 12 months;
- A client data collection system so that the effectiveness of these measures can be monitored.

## **ENDNOTES**

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- 2 ABS (2007) Recorded crime – victims 2006, Cat No 4510.0, ABS, Canberra, p.5.
- 3 J. Sanders, Shopfront Youth Legal Centre, Sydney Day 9, 17-04-2007.

- 4 For example A. Buxton, Anglicare NT, Darwin Day 3, 03-04-2007; R. Johnson, Eastern Health Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service, Melbourne Day 14, 24-04-2007.
- 5 For example see Davis, N., Hatty, S. & Burke, S. (1995) 'Rough justice: Social control and resistance among homeless youth' in Simpson, C. & Hil, R. (eds) *Ways of resistance: social control and young people in Australia*, Hale and Iremonger, Sydney.
- 6 For example, Young Person Melbourne Day 13, 23-04-2007; Young Person Brisbane Day 5, 10-04-2007;
- 7 Young Person, NYC Youth Survey, 11.
- 8 J. Sanders, Shopfront Youth Legal Centre, Sydney Day 9, 17-04-2007.
- 9 Ibid.
- 10 HREOC (1989) *Our Homeless Children*, AGPS, Canberra, p.49.
- 11 National Crime Prevention (1999) *Living rough: preventing crime and victimisation among homeless young people*, National Crime Prevention, Attorney-General's Department, Canberra, p.36.
- 12 Ibid.
- 13 J. Sanders, Shopfront Youth Legal Centre, Sydney Day 9, 17-04-2007.
- 14 Ibid.
- 15 M. Tinkler, PILCH Homeless Persons' Legal Clinic, Melbourne Day 14, 24-04-2007.
- 16 Ibid.
- 17 M. Taylor, Queensland Public Interest Law Clearinghouse, Homeless Persons' Legal Clinic, Brisbane Day 5, 10-04-2007.
- 18 Ibid.
- 19 Ibid.
- 20 Ibid.
- 21 Submission 66, Homeless Persons' Legal Clinic, Queensland Public Interest Law Clearing House with Brisbane Youth Service, Salvation Army Youth Outreach Service, Australian Red Cross.
- 22 Submission 35, Anglicare WA.
- 23 S. 47A Summary Offences Act NT.
- 24 Ibid
- 25 T. McNee, Alice Springs Youth Accommodation and Support Service, Alice Springs Day 21, 25-06-2007
- 26 R. Logie, YES! Housing, Anglicare WA, Perth Day 19, 07-06-2007
- 27 Submission 66, Homeless Persons' Legal Clinic, Queensland Public Interest Law Clearing House with Brisbane Youth Service, Salvation Army Youth Outreach Service, Australian Red Cross.
- 28 Submission 67, Shopfront Youth Legal Centre.
- 29 J. Cashen, PILCH Homeless Persons' Legal Clinic Melbourne Day 14, 24-04-2007.
- 30 Ibid..
- 31 Submission 67, Shopfront Youth Legal Centre.
- 32 J. Cashen, PILCH Homeless Persons' Legal Clinic Melbourne Day 14, 24-04-2007
- 33 Ibid
- 34 Ibid.
- 35 See <<http://www.justice.qld.gov.au/courts/factsht/homelessDiversion.htm>>, accessed 28-09-2007.
- 36 M. Taylor, Queensland Public Interest Law Clearinghouse, Homeless Persons' Legal Clinic, Brisbane Day 5, 10-04-2007.
- 37 Submission 66, Homeless Persons' Legal Clinic, Queensland Public Interest Law Clearing House with Brisbane Youth Service, Salvation Army Youth Outreach Service, Australian Red Cross.
- 38 Ibid.
- 39 Ibid.
- 40 Young person, Brisbane Day 5, 10-04-2007.
- 41 Ibid.
- 42 G. Pringle, Youth Drug and Alcohol Service, Sydney West Area Health Service, Sydney Day 9, 17-04-2007.
- 43 Ibid.
- 44 Ibid.
- 45 J. Solomon, Sisters Inside, Townsville Day 7, 12-04-2007.
- 46 G. Pringle, Youth Drug and Alcohol Service, Sydney West Area Health Service, Sydney Day 9, 17-04-2007.
- 47 Young person, Brisbane Day 5, 10-04-2007.
- 48 M. Young, Open Family Australia, Melbourne Day 13, 23-04-2007.
- 49 Young person, Brisbane Day 5, 10-04-2007.

- 50 Submission 69, Tasmanian Government.
- 51 Submission 43, Refugee Youth Issues Network of South Australia.
- 52 Ibid.
- 53 Young Person, Brisbane Day 6, 11-04-2007.
- 54 J. McKay, Zig Zag Housing Service, Brisbane Day 6, 11-04-2007.
- 55 M. Tinkler PILCH Homeless Persons' Legal Clinic, Melbourne Day 14, 24-04-2007.
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- 60 R. Howe, The Bridge Youth Services, Sydney Day 9, 17-04-2007.
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- 64 C. Axleby, Metropolitan Aboriginal Youth and Family Services, Adelaide Day 15, 26-04-2007.
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- 66 J. Solomon, Sisters Inside, Townsville Day 7, 12-04-2007.
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- 68 K. Crowe, Southern Youth and Family Services, Wollongong, Sydney Day 8, 16-04-2007.
- 69 Submission 69, Tasmanian Government.
- 70 M. Hunter, Youth Coalition of the ACT, Canberra Day 12, 20-04-2007.
- 71 Submission 74, Service to Youth Council.
- 72 Ibid.

# 19

Homeless young people are entirely dependent on Government income support. The Youth Allowance is designed to support full-time students and unemployed young people. The 'unreasonable to live at home' criteria provides additional support for homeless young people. The bureaucratic requirements of identification and evidence present barriers for homeless young people, demonstrated by the number of young people who enter SAAP services with no income support in place. For young people under the age of 15, the youth protocol sets down who is responsible for the younger homeless. But in practice many 12-15 year olds do not receive priority attention from their state or territory care and protection services and duly turn up in SAAP services. The level of income support available to homeless young people is insufficient for the costs of living independently: this needs review, as does inadequate rental assistance in a market where rents are rising steeply. The administration of benefits using 'breaching' causes many consequential problems. Compliance for homeless and at-risk young people should be approached differently.



## Chapter 19 | Income support

### Introduction

19.1 The Australian Government has the primary responsibility for providing income support to vulnerable Australians. This is achieved through the provision of pensions and benefits to unemployed people, students, the elderly, sole parents, people with disabilities and other vulnerable groups.

19.2 Payments from the Australian Government, through Centrelink, are a major source of income for homeless young people. Mission Australia, which undertakes an annual survey of young Australians and has included information about homeless young people, found that 27.8 per cent of homeless respondents identified a government allowance as their main source of support:

*This is in contrast with respondents living in stable housing, with only 5.2 per cent of this group identifying government allowances as their major source of income, highlighting the importance of adequate income support for homeless young people.<sup>1</sup>*

19.3 The chapter discusses the main types of income support for homeless young people, and their adequacy and highlights the difficulties homeless young people face in gaining and maintaining income support. A stable, adequate income is a critical element in regaining and maintaining stability in accommodation. Some recommendations have been included for the Australian Government to improve the income support system for homeless young people.

## Types of income support payments for homeless young people

### *Youth Allowance*

19.4 Youth Allowance is the main Centrelink payment for young people. It is for full-time students and unemployed young people. To receive Youth Allowance, unemployed young people must be undertaking 'approved activities'. These can be looking for work, voluntary work, or a combination of activities such as part-time study and on-the-job training while working.

19.5 Different rates of Youth Allowance are available depending on whether the young person is living at home or unable to live at home for various reasons. Homeless young people may be able to receive the 'independent' rate of Youth Allowance if they are able to show Centrelink they are unable to live at home with their parents or guardians because of:

- "extreme family breakdown" or other exceptional circumstances; or
- it would be unreasonable to expect them to stay at home because there would be a serious risk to their physical or mental health due to violence, sexual abuse or other unreasonable circumstances; or
- their parents cannot provide a suitable home because they lack stable accommodation.<sup>2</sup>

19.6 If a young person cannot prove 'independence' then a parental income test applies to their Youth Allowance.

### *Newstart Allowance*

19.7 Newstart Allowance is available to unemployed people from the age of 21 years. To receive Newstart an unemployed person must satisfy an activity test (i.e. be actively seeking work), be prepared to enter into an Activity Agreement, and meet certain residency requirements.

### *Disability Support Pension*

19.8 The Disability Support Pension (DSP) is available to people who are 16 years of age or over and:

- are permanently blind; or
- have a significant physical, intellectual or psychiatric 'impairment' which prevents them from working.

### *Parenting Payment*

19.9 A parenting payment is available for people who have a child or children in their care. For single people, payment can be made until the youngest child is eight years of age, and, for partnered people, payment can be made until the youngest child turns six. People may be eligible for alternative income support payment types once their children are above the maximum ages for the Parenting Payment to be paid.<sup>3</sup>



### *Special Benefit*

19.10 A homeless young person under 15 years may be paid Special Benefit, although the requirements of the relevant Commonwealth and State and territory Youth Protocol will need to be satisfied.<sup>4</sup>

### *Rent Assistance*

19.11 Commonwealth rent assistance is a non-taxable income supplement payable to eligible recipients of Centrelink benefits and/or support through the Family Assistance Office, who rent accommodation in the private rental market and pay rents above a set threshold based on their circumstances.<sup>5</sup>

## **Access to income support**

19.12 Accessing Centrelink benefits requires negotiating a bureaucratic maze. Shopfront Youth Legal Centre argued to the Inquiry that homeless young people commonly encounter difficulties with the income support system, owing to its immense complexity, and to the cracks that exist in the system.<sup>6</sup>

19.13 A young person applying for a Centrelink benefit needs to be able to provide identification, bank account details and a tax file number. An unemployed young person will have to make an appointment with Centrelink, agree to undertake 'approved activities', and register with a Job Network provider.

19.14 To gain the independent rate of Youth Allowance, Centrelink requires a homeless young person, their parents and a third person, in most cases, to complete statements explaining the circumstances at home. The young person will also need to meet with a Centrelink social worker to talk about their circumstances.<sup>7</sup>

19.15 The fact that many homeless young people present to services with no income support shows that negotiating the bureaucratic maze is difficult for them. For example, one service in north-eastern Victoria found that:

*... 33 per cent of all our young people presenting as being homeless were not receiving any form of social security or allowance.*<sup>8</sup>

19.16 The main difficulty appears to be that young people who have recently left home cannot prove they are homeless or independent for the purpose of receiving benefits.<sup>9</sup>

### *Income support for under 15s*

19.17 The only income support from Centrelink for young people aged under 15 years of age is Special Benefit, which is even more difficult to obtain than Youth Allowance or Newstart. To be paid the Special Benefit, the requirements of the relevant Youth Protocol must be satisfied.

19.18 The Youth Protocols are agreements made between the Australian Government and each state and territory Government. The current protocols assume that state and territory Governments have responsibility for young people under 15 years. An assessment by the relevant state or territory department regarding a source of support for a young homeless person should be made.

19.19 The Youth Protocol approach appears to be a sensible response to ensuring that a young person under 15 years who becomes homeless comes to the attention of the relevant state and territory authority. However, as discussed in Chapter 9 State Care and Protection, many young people who first come to the attention of the Care and Protection systems when aged between 12 and 15 years are not adequately supported by that system.

19.20 The Inquiry understands there are significant problems with the Youth Protocols. The relevant state or territory government department has a specific number of days to respond to a request for assistance; however, Centrelink payments are not made until this time has lapsed and will then only be paid where the young person can meet the requirements for payment, such as proof of identity and proof that they are unable to live at home<sup>10</sup>, which is likely to cause further delays.

19.21 The Inquiry was told of instances where the Youth Protocol did not work. In one case the relevant state authority and Centrelink both:

*... felt it was the responsibility of the other department, and it was only by protracted negotiations and by instituting an appeal provision within the legal system that we in fact got some sort of resolution of the matter and an agreed outcome for that young person.*<sup>11</sup>

### *Advocacy from youth workers*

19.22 Good advocacy from youth workers can help smooth the way for young people to gain benefits, but this does not always happen quickly and in the meantime a young person is often left with no income. Youth services, such as SAAP, JPET and youth legal centres prioritise and divert resources (e.g. staff time) to assist young people to gain access to Centrelink benefits. Mission Australia told the Inquiry:

*We would certainly have young people coming to our services who currently do not access Centrelink, and so one of the first things we would aim to do is connect them to that.*<sup>12</sup>

19.23 The Inquiry was told that at times Centrelink could be very helpful in assisting with some of these issues, particularly with the issue of identification. Good working relationships between youth workers and the Centrelink Social Worker can greatly assist the young person negotiate the maze<sup>13</sup> and shorten the time waiting for benefits to be paid.

19.24 While these youth services usually do their best to assist young people with Centrelink they are not always successful. This could be due to the young person's lack of eligibility or inability to prove homelessness.

19.25 The degree to which young people have no income and little support is of great concern. The extent of this is unknown, but various estimates indicate that it is a significant problem. For example, the Executive Officer of Australian Federation of Homelessness Organisations told the Inquiry that:

*One-third of young people who leave SAAP have no source of income.*<sup>14</sup>

19.26 This does not, of course, include those young people who have had no contact with SAAP agencies.

## **Adequacy of income support**

19.27 The maximum level of Youth Allowance payable is \$348.10 per fortnight for single young people under 21 years living away from home with no children. For unemployed single young people aged over 21 with no children, the maximum rate of Newstart is \$424.30 per fortnight. In addition, for those living in private rental accommodation an additional amount of up to \$104.00 per fortnight is available in rent assistance if rent is over \$92.60 per fortnight. The maximum rate of rent assistance is payable if rent is more than \$231.27 per fortnight. Rent Assistance is only up to \$69.33 per fortnight for young people in share rental accommodation.<sup>15</sup>

19.28 Therefore, the maximum amount that a young person aged less than 21 years is expected to live on is \$452.10 per fortnight, including rent assistance. For those over 21 years the maximum amount is \$528.30 per fortnight. These both are significantly lower than the Henderson Poverty Line level for a single person with no dependents, which was \$571.10 per fortnight in March 2007.<sup>16</sup>

### *Income support is insufficient to cover living costs*

19.29 The level of income support from Youth Allowance was criticised by most service providers and young people in their verbal and written evidence to the Inquiry as being insufficient to cover basic living costs. The Youth Accommodation Association (NSW), told the Inquiry:

*... the basic youth allowance, including rent assistance, is \$208 a week, while the average two bedroom unit in Sydney is \$300 a week even in share accommodation, so if that young person was paying \$150, it would leave \$60 to cover other expenses such as food, clothing, utilities, transport, school or university expenses, any entertainment, all of those basic needs.*<sup>17</sup>

19.30 A homeless young person in Brisbane told the Inquiry about her experience of Youth Allowance and renting:

*Being on the independent youth allowance is not a lot. It's exceedingly tough to do. I have had to do it before and I got rent assistance, which worked it up to \$400 a fortnight. When you are paying \$250 rent a fortnight, you don't have a lot left over for food at all.*<sup>18</sup>

19.31 The Youth Affairs Council of South Australia told the Inquiry that the low

levels of income support payments mean that:

*... when young people are unemployed for a sustained period, they are most likely to be suffering significant material and personal hardship. Income support for young people is well below independent living costs, meaning that those who do not have families on which they can rely economically, are forced into poverty.*<sup>19</sup>

19.32 The Inquiry was told that some young people become so desperate that they turn to criminal activity to obtain food and other necessities. UnitingCare Burnside informed the Inquiry of some of the impacts of low levels of income support as told to them by their clients:

*Some young people spoke about the desperation and helplessness that results from inadequate income. Unable to find their next meal, some young people resort to shop lifting food on occasion in order to survive.*<sup>20</sup>

19.33 It is not uncommon for young people to avoid public transport fares and risk fines because they have no income to spare for such necessities. They risk the imposition of significant fines for fare evasion (see Chapter 18 Crime and Legal Issues for details).

19.34 The general consensus among young people, youth workers et al is that income support, Youth Allowance and Newstart in particular, is insufficient to pay for the necessities of life, even without the additional costs associated with job search, or attendance at school, university or TAFE.

### *Rent Assistance*

19.35 Rent Assistance has not been keeping pace with the large increases in rent that have been experienced throughout Australia. In its written submission to the Inquiry, the Western Australian Government's Department of Housing and Works drew the Inquiry's attention to the erosion of the effectiveness of the Rent Assistance. The Department advised that currently the program only delivers affordability to about a third of recipients and pointed out that any increase in the rate had been overtaken by rental costs in Perth:

*The median private rental for Perth houses increased by 67 per cent between the June quarter 2001 and the December quarter 2006, which far outpaced the 18 per cent growth in Commonwealth Rent Assistance. From representing 32 per cent of the median rent in 2001, the value of rent assistance declined to 23 per cent of the median rent by December 2006.*<sup>21</sup>

19.36 In a combined submission the Council of Homeless Persons (Vic) with the Youth Affairs Council of Victoria and Project i questioned the benefits of the Australian Government's \$2.13 billion per annum expenditure on the Rent Assistance program:

*Whilst those young people on Youth Allowance or Newstart Allowance qualify for Rent Assistance, 35 per cent of all Rent Assistance recipients across Australia still spend 30 per cent or more of their household income on rent. The National Centre for Social and Economic Modelling upholds this portion as a generally accepted indicator of 'housing stress.'*<sup>22</sup>

19.37 The combined submission also expressed concern about the lack of support for young people on low wages who do not receive any assistance with rents because:

*... eligibility for Rent Assistance is linked to receipt of other government benefits, which means that young people who are employed at the minimum wage or part-time, do not qualify.*<sup>23</sup>

### *Payments inadequate for educational purposes*

19.38 Although, a lack of income was not the primary reason for homeless young people to leave school, the Inquiry was often told that a lack of income inhibits homeless young people from returning to mainstream education and training. For example, UnitingCare Burnside told the Inquiry that:

*Poor income also restricts a young person's options to pursue further education.*<sup>24</sup>

19.39 The North East Support and Action for Youth was one of a number of organisations which suggested that:

*Greater income support for young people, who live independently for various reasons, to enable young people to continue their education ... is really important.*<sup>25</sup>

### *Age Differences*

19.40 The level of payment varies due to differences in the age of the recipient despite similar living costs. For young people who are under 21 years old with no dependants, the Youth Allowance is \$76.20 per fortnight less than the amount paid to Newstart Allowance recipients aged 21 years with no dependants. The Council for Homeless Persons combined submission argued that:

*... this disparity is groundless and unjust given that housing and other necessary living costs do not vary with age.*<sup>26</sup>

## **Maintaining benefits**

### *Activity Tests*

19.41 Students on Youth Allowance must remain in full-time study or face the removal of their Youth Allowance. For those under the school leaving age in their state or territory, participation in education is usually an activity requirement for Youth Allowance. The school leaving age is 16 years in most jurisdictions in Australia.<sup>27</sup>

19.42 Some states are raising the school leaving age to 17 years unless the young person is attending TAFE or another registered training provider, or is in appropriate employment. For example, in Western Australia from 1 January 2008 the school leaving age will be 17 years, unless permission is granted to attend a TAFE college, undertake an apprenticeship or traineeship, or work in a job that will improve employment prospects.<sup>28</sup> The impact of these changes on eligibility for Youth Allowance is unclear at this stage, but will most likely require young people to remain in education or training to maintain their benefits unless they can find full-time work.

19.43 For unemployed young people, to maintain their Newstart Allowance or Youth Allowance, recipients must be actively seeking and willing to undertake paid employment. In addition, a young person may be required to satisfy an activity test in one or more of the following ways:

- undertake specific job search requirements;
- enter into an Activity Agreement;
- undertake “mutual obligation” activities or other activities such as community or voluntary work, “Work for the Dole”, JPET, or part-time study (see Chapter 20).

### *Breaching*

19.44 Youth Allowance (unemployed), Newstart Allowance, and some Special Benefit recipients are required to enter into an Activity Agreement. For most young people passing this activity test may not appear to be too onerous.

19.45 Homeless young people can be granted an exemption from the activity test because of their homelessness but this exemption lasts only for the time it takes to address the immediate crisis or 13 weeks, whichever is the shorter period. An extension may be granted at the end of the period but an application needs to be made.

19.46 In practice it appears that many homeless young people or young people at risk of homelessness are required to satisfy the activity test. For homeless young people, however, fulfilling these requirements may be a difficult task. Homelessness itself is an impediment to fulfilling the test. Not having a fixed address means that correspondence from Centrelink is often missed or received too late. The Queensland Public Interest Law Clearing House in a combined submission with a number of key Queensland services, commented that:

The system is not overtly discriminatory towards homeless young people, but rather there are systemic problems preventing homeless young people from accessing entitlements under the scheme. A requirement for the receipt of benefits is that people respond to letters promptly, regularly apply for jobs and attend interviews. Because of their homelessness, many young people simply do not have the capacity to undertake the activities required to ensure they receive regular benefits.<sup>29</sup>

19.47 If a young person does not apply for the required number of jobs, misses a job interview, does not comply with the Work for the Dole program, does not undertake a required labour market program, and/or misses a Centrelink appointment without an acceptable excuse, they will fail the activity test. If a young person does not meet the requirements of the activity test without a reasonable excuse, often referred to as ‘breaching’, they may incur a penalty. Penalties for ‘breaching’ can be severe, and include the suspension of payments for the number of days it takes for a person to comply with a rescheduled participation requirement or for a repeated or more serious breach the penalty will be an eight week no payment period.<sup>30</sup>

19.48 The Welfare Rights Network reported a dramatic increase in the incidence of social security penalties imposed on unemployed young people receiving benefits between 1998 and 2001.<sup>31</sup> This same report highlighted that young homeless people

on Youth Allowance or Newstart are disproportionately affected by indiscriminately applied penalties. This is shown by the fact that 35 per cent of penalties applied by Centrelink in that period were subsequently revoked.

19.49 The suspension of benefits payment for up to eight weeks is generally regarded as extremely harsh by most youth workers and results in young people facing “... extreme hardship and poverty”.<sup>32</sup>

### *Debts with Centrelink*

19.50 Many homeless young people end up owing Centrelink for ‘over payments’. When a young person’s circumstances change and Centrelink is not informed immediately, overpayments can occur that need to be repaid. For example, homeless young people often have difficulty in staying in education or training full-time, a requirement of Youth Allowance for students. As a result, if they drop out of education and fail to inform Centrelink immediately their payment continues as though they had remained in education. This results in a debt to Centrelink that needs to be repaid out of future payments. The Youth Allowance, created through the merging of Austudy and unemployment benefits for young people, was meant to overcome problems encountered by young people moving in and out of education:

*However, young people switching between education and job-seeking continue to experience problems with Centrelink overpayments and debts.*<sup>33</sup>

### *Pregnant young women*

19.51 Unemployed pregnant young women on Youth Allowance or Newstart must meet the activity test until six weeks before the expected date of birth of their child. Several services pointed out the unreasonableness of expecting pregnant homeless young women to look for work:

*Centrelink [parenting payment] support does not start until after the birth, and the young women are expected to still be job hunting whilst pregnant.*<sup>34</sup>

19.52 Job hunting, Work for the Dole or other required activity for Youth Allowance or Newstart would seem to be a highly inappropriate priority for these young women at a time when a focus on stable housing, antenatal care, parenting education and re-connection to community is urgently needed.

### *Income needed to stabilise accommodation*

19.53 Having no income because Centrelink benefits are refused or withdrawn can lead to continued homelessness. The Salvation Army (Tasmania) told the Inquiry that:

*The lack of income forces some young people to sleep on the streets and increases the chances of offending behaviour to obtain food and clothing.*<sup>35</sup>

19.54 Having income support payments cut, even if temporarily, means that young people trying to stabilise their accommodation end up back in the homelessness system. Southern Youth and Family Services (NSW) told the Inquiry:

*... how can a young homeless person maintain their accommodation when they are taken off their benefits? There is a serious cost to this, not just to the young person, but for instance, if they're evicted, then there is a cost to the system in re-locating the young person or the young person entering emergency accommodation. The punishment regime is huge and we remain unconvinced it assists young people at all.*<sup>36</sup>

19.55 This is a common view held by most organisations represented at the Inquiry's hearings and in numerous submissions from services working with young people. For example, the combined submission from the Homeless Persons' Legal Clinic, Queensland Public Interest Law Clearing House (QPILCH) and a number of other key Queensland services stated that having income support paid intermittently is a:

*... major impediment to young people moving out of homelessness... Without access to the regular income from this agency [Centrelink], they are much more likely to remain in a situation of homelessness as they are not able to afford rent payments for adequate housing.*<sup>37</sup>

19.56 QPILCH quoted a recent survey by the Salvation Army, which found that '... if young people are 'breached' by Centrelink and have their payments suspended, up to 16.5 per cent may end up in a situation of homelessness'.<sup>38</sup> This is a vicious circle because:

*The exigencies of their circumstances then prevent them from meeting their Centrelink requirements as they have to apply themselves to more pressing matters such as seeking alternative funds and securing temporary accommodation.*<sup>39</sup>

### *Financial penalty in returning home*

19.57 One parent suggested that a young person on the independent rate of Youth Allowance or special benefits is financially penalised if they return to the family home. She wrote that Centrelink:

*... by providing 'special benefits' which is the equivalent to the youth allowance - approximately \$348.00 per fortnight plus rent assistance ... if that young person does decide to return to the family home, they have to return to the parents' pensions as beneficiaries and forgo up to \$200.00 per fortnight in payments from Centrelink, making the transition back to family a 'non-viable' option for young people based on financial decisions alone.*<sup>40</sup>

She considered that:

*This was like driving a wedge between that parent and the young person.*<sup>41</sup>

However, this was not a widely held view.

## **Findings and Recommendations**

19.58 The maximum level of Youth Allowance should be raised to, at least, the level of Newstart. Independent young people aged 17 years face the same costs in renting properties etc as young people aged over 21 years.



### **Recommendation 19.1**

**The NYC Inquiry recommends that the total benefit for a young person who is homeless be equivalent to the adult Newstart allowance.**

19.59 It is too difficult for some young people to 'prove' to Centrelink they are homeless. New systems should be considered and the views of service providers from SAAP, Reconnect and other services need to be taken into account by Centrelink when making a determination on eligibility.

### **Recommendation 19.2**

**The NYC Inquiry recommends that more weight be accorded to the professional assessment of service providers as to whether a young person is eligible for the 'unable to live at home' level of benefit.**

19.60 Income support for young people under the age of 15 years needs to be clarified. The delays the Inquiry heard about are not helpful and actually hinder the ability of young people to stay in education and accommodation. Consideration should be given to paying a young person special benefit until the relevant child protection authority can make an assessment.

### **Recommendation 19.3**

**The NYC Inquiry recommends that the emergency special benefit be payable to young people under the age of 15 years and their carers until a determination of child protection issues and placement can be made and as well as decisions about the most appropriate place for that young person.**

19.61 The 'breaching' of young people, leaving them without an income is a punitive and unjust way of applying consequences for young people on benefits who fail to keep appointments or do not respond to letters from Centrelink. The change in terminology from 'breach' to 'failure' under the Compliance Framework from 1 July 2006 is one indication of the sensitivity of this area of Centrelink practices. Homeless young people, in particular, need to be given support and encouragement to find employment and maintain themselves in education or training. Punishing them for missing an interview or Centrelink appointment is unlikely to engender a positive attitude to Centrelink and its staff, let alone encourage job-seeking or study. Indigenous young people who move around frequently often do not receive letters sent to certain addresses. One measure might be to withhold payments but restore them once a response has been received. This might achieve the same result but carry an incentive to comply rather than an applied punishment. Another measure might be to quarantine rental payments, or another might be to not withhold but transfer the receiving of the income support from the young person to an agency or an adult carer. Allowing more professional discretion and flexible decision-making options for Centrelink staff would also help to reduce the number of disrupted payments to needy young people. The Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) is the policy contractor of what is now called 'participation compliance'. A more compassionate and relevant approach to policy development by DEEWR would considerably improve the income support situation for homeless young people.

#### **Recommendation 19.4**

**The NYC Inquiry recommends that Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) 'participation compliance' policy be reviewed to achieve more appropriate responses to the income support needs of homeless young people.**

#### **Recommendation 19.5**

**The NYC Inquiry recommends that financial circumstances and homelessness be considered salient factors in discretionary decisions about any sanctions applying to the administration of Centrelink benefits.**

19.62 Consideration needs to be given to the usefulness of Rent Assistance in the private rental market. It is currently too low to be of sufficient assistance for many and either should be raised in line with market rents or alternatives need to be considered. The vulnerability of the current policy balance has been revealed as rents have steeply risen in recent years.

#### **Recommendations 19.6**

**The NYC recommends that national policy on youth homelessness establishes a different balance between rent assistance, supported accommodation and public and community housing to effect a lower reliance on rental assistance and greater access to affordable public and community housing stock.**

#### **Recommendation 19.7**

**The NYC Inquiry recommends a review of the level of rental assistance available to homeless young people be undertaken, with consideration given to a higher level of payment adjusted to state and regional rental variation.**

19.63 In the past, Centrelink and its predecessor the Department of Social Security have been innovative in exploring appropriate ways of reaching hard to access groups such as homeless young people. In 1991, after the Burdekin Report, the Youth Pilot Projects (YPP) trialled new models of delivering services to homeless young people. In 1993, 10 permanent Youth Service Units were opened to follow up the outcomes of the Youth Pilot Projects. A similar approach to testing new and effective support models may need to be re-instituted.

## **ENDNOTES**

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- 11 D. Bartholomew, Youth Advocacy Centre, Brisbane Day 6, 11-04-2007.
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- 17 D. Curtis, Youth Accommodation Association of NSW, Sydney Day 8, 16-04-2007.
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- 19 J. Duncan, Youth Affairs Council of South Australia, Adelaide Day 15, 26-04-2007.
- 20 Submission 78, UnitingCare Burnside.
- 21 Submission 56, Department of Housing and Works, Western Australian Government.
- 22 Submission 85, Council to Homeless Persons with Youth Affairs Council of Victoria and Project i (Key Centre for Women's Health in Society).
- 23 Ibid.
- 24 Submission 78, UnitingCare Burnside.
- 25 G. James, North East Support and Action for Youth, Melbourne Day 14, 24-04-2007.
- 26 Submission 85, Council to Homeless Persons with Youth Affairs Council of Victoria and Project i (Key Centre for Women's Health in Society).
- 27 The exceptions are NSW, the ACT and the NT where it is 15 years.
- 28 See <www.det.wa.edu.au/schoolleavingage>, accessed 24-08-2007.
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- 32 K. Day, Southern Youth and Family Services, Wollongong, Sydney Day 8, 16-04-2007.
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- 34 Submission 13, Oenghus Youth Services and Alted Elizabeth College.
- 35 Submission 52, The Salvation Army (Tasmania).
- 36 K. Day, Southern Youth and Family Services, Wollongong, Sydney Day 8, 16-04-2007.
- 37 Submission 66, Homeless Persons' Legal Clinic, Queensland Public Interest Law Clearing House with Brisbane Youth Service, Salvation Army Youth Outreach Service, Australian Red Cross.
- 38 Ibid.
- 39 Ibid.
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- 41 Ibid.



# 20

Unemployment has decreased to the lowest level for decades and the Australian economy is experiencing difficulty getting enough skilled workers in some sectors. However, homeless young people have difficulty accessing the labour market even when there are semi-skilled jobs for which they might qualify. Evidence was provided that Job Network generally does not service the needs of highly disadvantaged young people appropriately and that Work for the Dole is a poorly conceived work experience model. The JPET program was discussed as having positive aspects but changes from one department to another and the refocusing on employment outcomes has degraded JPET's value for homeless young people. An under-estimation of the issues that many homeless young people face and the effort required to overcome them underpins much of the poor policy in this area. Major reform is needed to link education, training and employment program with accommodation and other supports.



## Chapter 20 | Employment, Education and Training

### Introduction

20.1 In Chapter 8 Labour Market Marginalisation the changes in the youth labour market over the past 15 years were discussed and the significant barriers that limit employment opportunities for homeless young people were highlighted. Clearly the problems of youth homelessness and unemployment are connected. Homeless young people face many barriers in finding and maintaining jobs even in a relatively buoyant labour market. Some manage the task and others are able to stay connected to education or training in some form. Some young people become homeless because of the difficulty in maintaining a home while on limited income from insecure and poorly paid work. Many homeless young people remain unemployed for long periods, resulting in them experiencing difficulty in moving out of homelessness.

20.2 This chapter briefly describes the Commonwealth Government's labour market programs, some state and territory government programs and a few community services that assist homeless young people to find work. Consideration is also given to whether homeless young people can benefit from these programs and what improvements are needed to better assist them to gain employment.

### Australian Government Policy

20.3 The Australian Government has the primary responsibility for supporting unemployed people. This is achieved through income support systems (discussed in Chapter 19), labour market programs and industrial relations policy.

20.4 As the number of unemployed people has fallen since the early 1990s, those

remaining without work tend to be the most disadvantaged. During this period, Australian Government labour market policies changed to focus on personal skills acquisition (e.g. job-search training, on-the-job skills training and intensive personal assistance), with an increasing emphasis on 'mutual obligation'.<sup>1</sup> Mutual obligation is:

*... about you giving something back to the community, which supports you. This means you are expected to actively look for work, accept suitable work offers and undertake extra activities to improve your chances of finding work.*<sup>2</sup>

20.5 Unemployed people who are in receipt of a government benefit are expected to undertake certain activities to assist them find employment or participate in community service programs when required. The Australian Government's main program supporting mutual obligation is the Work for the Dole scheme.

20.6 This policy development reflects a shift to more neo-liberal policy settings that reflect a greater belief in self-reliance, and the consequent reduction in government social supports and economic interventions.

20.7 The industrial relations system, under WorkChoices, has been changed to place greater emphasis on agreements between employers and individual employees with a consequent diminution in the significance of the Australian industrial award system. Under the current system, state governments can still protect employees under the age of 18 through the continued application of child labour laws. For example, in NSW, the relevant legislation requires that young people must be employed under terms and conditions which are at least equivalent to those specified in NSW awards and legislation.<sup>3</sup> However, not all jurisdictions have similar legislation. The new Federal Labor Government has moved quickly to reverse much of the reform undertaken under the Howard Government.

20.8 All people 18 years and over now need to be able to negotiate their own wages and working conditions if the employer adopts the individual agreement option. Shop-front Legal Centre believes that:

*... this presents a further serious obstacle towards the ability of homeless young people to find, and to secure, meaningful, long-term employment, which is fair in terms of both pay and conditions. The requirement under WorkChoices that young adults negotiate their terms of employment disadvantages these individuals - many of whom are already inexperienced in the workplace, who are unlikely to have the confidence to negotiate their employment contract, and who will be placed in a position of unfair bargaining power.*<sup>4</sup>

20.9 At the time of writing there has been a federal election in which the Australian Labor Party (ALP) gained a majority in the House of Representatives. The ALP's electoral platform included significant changes to the industrial relations system in Australia. It remains to be seen how this platform will be translated into legislation and whether the Australian Senate will pass the legislation.



## Labour market programs

### *Job Network*

20.10 The Australian Government-funded Job Network is the main system for assisting unemployed people to find work. It is a national network of private and community organisations that assists unemployed people, particularly the long-term unemployed, by providing advice on job search techniques, career options and employment programs. For longer-term unemployed people it provides intensive support on a one-to-one basis for job search planning and training.<sup>5</sup> There are a few specialist youth Job Network providers but most unemployed young people attend mainstream services.

20.11 Catholic Social Services Australia has been critical of the Job Network for not adequately assisting the most disadvantaged job seekers. They have reported an increase in the complexity of needs of job seekers including an increase in the proportion of clients with low educational attainment.<sup>6</sup> Catholic Social Services Australia suggest that the problem lies in the way in which the Job Network services are funded and their quality measured which currently encourages providers to focus on the more advantaged job seekers.<sup>7</sup> This was reflected in the evidence presented to the Inquiry, which was told that Job Network services were not always helpful to homeless young people. UnitingCare Burnside's submission stated:

*While assistance, both practical and financial, may be available through their Job Network provider this wasn't always seen to be beneficial. One young person stated that her Job Network provider had done little if anything to assist her in finding work.<sup>8</sup>*

*A range of evidence given during the NYC hearings about the Job Network highlighted its limitations to appropriately respond to the complex needs of young people who were homeless or at-risk of becoming homeless.*

### *Work for the Dole*

20.12 The Work for the Dole scheme aims to give long-term unemployed people work experience while doing something worthwhile for their community. It is an approved activity for mutual obligation purposes. Unemployed people aged 18 or over and on Newstart, Youth Allowance, Disability Support Pension or Parenting Payment can volunteer for Work for the Dole.<sup>9</sup> The aim of the Work for the Dole program is to:

*... foster work habits and attitudes, improve participants' self esteem; and contribute to local communities by the establishment of projects of value to the community.<sup>10</sup>*

20.13 An independent evaluation of the Work for the Dole program found that the scheme had many failings in that it did not significantly improve self-esteem or attitudes to work (these being already positive) and, in particular, did not suit disadvantaged job seekers, including homeless young people.<sup>11</sup> The Australian Council of Social Service (ACOSS) has been critical of the scheme because it does not include formal training, does not lead to paid employment and compares poorly in terms of employment with Intensive Assistance under the Job Network and the former Working Nation schemes of Jobskills and Jobstart.<sup>12</sup>

### *Green Corps*

20.14 Green Corps is an:

*Australian Government youth development and environmental training program for young people aged between 17 and 20 years. Green Corps provides young people with the opportunity to volunteer their time and effort to conserve, preserve and restore Australia's natural environment and cultural heritage.*<sup>13</sup>

20.15 While Green Corps has many positive aspects, such as its link to training and a focus on employment in an industry of interest to the participant, it is unlikely to be suitable to most homeless young people. It requires a high level of commitment to a single industry and is full-time for 26 weeks.

### *Indigenous Youth Employment Consultants*<sup>14</sup>

20.16 The Indigenous Youth Employment Consultants (IYEC) program provides support and encouragement for Indigenous young people aged 15 to 19 to stay in education or move into training and/or work.

20.17 The program is for Indigenous young people who:

- are not going to school
- want to continue their education and/or training and would like extra support
- would like to join the workforce.

20.18 Consultants working for Job Network providers are found across Australia in areas where there is a good labour market. They work closely with Indigenous young people, as well as their families, local communities and businesses, schools, vocational educational and training providers and other Job Network providers to help them stay in education or move into training and/or work.

### *Personal Support Programme*

20.19 The Personal Support Programme (PSP) helps people tackle difficult personal circumstances and stay connected to the economic and social life of the community. It is a bridge between short-term crisis services and employment services such as Job Network.<sup>15</sup> While not specifically a youth program, some young people, particularly those over 21 years, may access the program as part of their requirements to receive Newstart Allowance.

### *Job Placement, Employment and Training Program*

20.20 The Job Placement, Employment and Training (JPET) Program is the main labour market program for homeless young people in Australia. It ran as a pilot between 1993 and 1995 in 44 sites across Australia. After a hiatus in 1996, an expanded JPET program commenced in 1997<sup>16</sup> and is still operating in 2007.

20.21 The Department of Employment and Workplace Relations (DEWR) states that the program:

*... assists young people aged between 15 and 21 years, who are homeless or at risk of homelessness or have multiple barriers that severely limit their capacity to:*

- participate socially in the life of their communities*
- participate in economic focused activity such as education, employment or vocational training and/or*
- benefit from employment assistance.*

*The program helps young people overcome barriers such as:*

- drug or alcohol abuse*
- sexual abuse or violence*
- domestic violence*
- behavioural problems*
- physical or intellectual disability*
- mental health problems*
- self harming behaviours*
- history of committing offences*
- experiences of torture and trauma.<sup>17</sup>*

20.22 In a combined submission the Council to Homeless Persons, the Youth Affairs Council of Victoria and Project i told the Inquiry they believe that JPET:

*... has historically been seen as a “pre-employment” program that holistically examines issues affecting young people’s ability to move towards greater stability and independence through engagement in employment, education and training opportunities.<sup>18</sup>*

20.23 The JPET program has been shifted from one government department to another several times since its inception. It commenced in the Department of Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs (DEETYA) but then moved to the Department of Family and Community Services (FACS, then FaCSIA is now FaHCSIA since the 2007 Federal election). In 2003 the JPET program moved from the Department of Families, Community Services & Indigenous Affairs (FACSIA) to the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations (DEWR). Youth workers and policy workers told the Inquiry they believed this latest administrative shift had, as one witness put it, “... changed JPET’s focus significantly”.<sup>19</sup>

20.24 One of the significant changes with JPET moving from FaCSIA to DEWR is that it has gone from being a voluntary program to a compulsory one if a young person is receiving a Centrelink benefit i.e. it may be part of an activity agreement (see Chapter 19 Income Support). According to one JPET worker the changes mean that young people:

*... have to actively participate by having contact with us face-to-face, by achieving little goals that they put down on their case plan. So, the focus has gone from more of a voluntary program to more ... they need to do this, in order to receive payments.<sup>20</sup>*

20.25 This can have both positive and negative effects:

*... because then it actually encourages the young person to start looking at the bigger picture and engaging, but also it can be very detrimental to those that just don't have those skills, social skills, or have the ability to remember an appointment or keep in contact.*<sup>21</sup>

20.26 The shift has also meant that JPET is being required to focus on employment outcomes at the expense of the social development of young people. The social development of young people is considered, by an experienced youth worker, to be "... essential if they're going to obtain the employment outcome".<sup>22</sup>

20.27 The shift has also entailed an increase in reporting requirements to the Government. These changes in reporting have led some to question the value of the program. In Sydney, the Inquiry heard the musings of a service provider who was considering whether to:

*... pull out of it, it's getting so hard at the moment, because they're wanting you to count more and more and be judged by the fact of how many kids at this point of time, you've got into jobs.*<sup>23</sup>

20.28 Anglicare WA, in its submission, was highly critical of the recent changes to the JPET program:

*JPET was once a highly effective mechanism for assisting homeless young people to overcome social barriers to employment and training. This will be lost if current trends of an increase in focus on economic outcomes over social outcomes and the increased competition between providers may result in providers being more concerned about increasing their business share rather than building supporting relationships with young people in order to meet their needs.*<sup>24</sup>

20.29 Despite the problems in administering the program and questions about its effectiveness, there appears to be an increasing demand for JPET services. For example, one JPET worker highlighted to the Inquiry the ongoing need for the program:

*Being a JPET worker on a program that is designed specifically for homeless or at risk of homeless youth is really quite demanding at the moment. We currently have ACT waiting lists of about 50 clients, and caseloads are relatively high.*<sup>25</sup>

20.30 The increase in uptake could be put down either to the compulsory nature of the program for unemployed young people or to the last DEWR tender process for the JPET program that pushed each service provider to cover a wider geographical catchment area and set higher targets for the number of young people supported under the program.

20.3 The same worker also told the Inquiry of institutional barriers that hinder co-ordination between SAAP and JPET services as each has its own funding department and requirements. She indicated that JPET and SAAP services need to work together to achieve the outcomes for their clients desired by both programs.<sup>26</sup>

20.32 Recommendations were made to the Inquiry that JPET return to FaHCSIA, and more closely align with the SAAP program and address the increasingly onerous

administrative demands of program management.

## **State and Territory Government Programs**

20.33 Programs to assist unemployed people to gain work are responsibility of the Australian Government. However, some state governments have reported to the Inquiry on their own efforts to assist unemployed young people. Most state and territory governments have programs aimed at increasing participation in education and training by disadvantaged young people, including homeless young people.

### *South Australia Works Program*

20.34 The South Australian Government's South Australia Works Program recognises young people as a priority group. Under this program, young people have the opportunity to gain job and life skills while still at school. They are provided with alternative learning options if they are at risk of leaving school early, and can take up traineeships in state and local government employment.<sup>27</sup>

### *Queensland Education and Training Reforms for the Future*

20.35 This is a package of reforms that represents the Queensland Government's response to the clear connections between education and sustainable employment. A key element of reforms was the introduction of a compulsory participation phase in which all young people are required to participate in learning or earning:

- for two years after they complete compulsory schooling (i.e. year 10 or 16 years); or
- until they have completed a Queensland Certificate of Education, Certificate III or IV vocational qualification; or
- until they have turned 17 years of age.<sup>28</sup>

20.36 Young people who are in full-time employment are not required to participate in education and training.

### *Victorian Youth Employment, Education and Training Initiative (YEETI)*

20.37 In Victoria, the Youth Homelessness Action Plan includes the Youth Employment, Education and Training Initiative (YEETI) that assists young people aged 15 to 25 years who are homeless or at risk of homelessness, and have a long-term history of difficulties in education, employment or accommodation.

20.38 The YEETI aims to enable young people to make a successful transition from the homelessness service system to independence through education, training or employment outcomes.<sup>29</sup>

### *Community programs*

20.39 Using funds from a variety of sources depending on the target group and the nature of the program, many community agencies have developed specific programs to assist homeless people to gain employment. The Inquiry heard of some of the commu-

nity efforts occurring across Australia.

### *Youth Enterprise*

20.40 Youth enterprise schemes have been developed in some areas to assist young people to gain experience and skills for employment and business. In Warrnambool, for example, the Inquiry was told about:

*... a program called Culture Shift ...[that] provides a youth enterprise focus. We have a shop where we sell young people's gear and we have a number of youth enterprise projects that we run out of that particular shop.*<sup>30</sup>

### *Community Living Association*

20.41 The Community Living Association in Brisbane has established programs to assist homeless young people who have intellectual disabilities. They told the Inquiry of:

*One homeless young guy we support, he now sells The Big Issue. He actually sells it at the University of Queensland. We have recruited a group of students to support him to sell The Big Issue. Each year as students move over, they will recruit some new students to support him. He has a stand and they go and talk to him and spend some time with him, and he's out there selling the Big Issue. That is a bit of a stable income there. That was a young man who had never... actually made attempts to sell The Big Issue before on street corners but people ignored him. He wasn't able to hold the concentration to stay there for a period of time and wasn't often successful at that.*<sup>31</sup>

20.42 The same organisation established:

*... a workers' co-operative which now employs 16 people, and it has contracts with the Brisbane City Council to do parks, and also does catering in a cafe. What we found is that that can only survive if you have essentially an able bodied worker working alongside, so there is one on one or at the most one on two.*<sup>32</sup>

20.43 The co-operative costs the organisation \$100,000 per year to maintain and represents good value for money (at around \$6250 per client per year) but without external financial support may be unviable in the long-term.

### *SAAP Employment Assistance*

20.44 Many SAAP services assist homeless young people with employment through coordination with or referral to JPET, Job Network or other assistance. Other SAAP services have a more hands-on approach. In Launceston, one SAAP service noted that while homeless people encountered barriers to employment such as poor literacy and a history of incarceration, a major factor was the lack of transport to places where work was available. Their solution was to put their clients "... on a bus and drive them in ungodly hours of the morning to agricultural work because there was a shortage in that industry".<sup>33</sup> The service had been doing this for around four-and-a-half years and reported positive outcomes such as homeless young people having disposable income from employment which, according to the SAAP worker:

*They actually worked hard for it and so weren't going to, to quote them, "piss that up against the wall. I worked hard for that".<sup>34</sup>*

20.45 This service has taken an additional step and linked with training in horticulture that is related to the agricultural employment opportunities found for their clients.

### *Joined up services*

20.46 A group of organisations in Victoria has come together to develop a new co-ordinated system, called YP4, to assist individuals aged 18 to 35 years who experience both homelessness and unemployment in a 'joined up' service. In their submission YP4 claimed that their program is:

*... a new paradigm for assisting individuals who experience both homelessness and unemployment, in recognition that existing forms of housing and employment assistance are linear, ineffective and inefficient for homeless jobseekers. YP4 offers homeless jobseekers a single and consistent point of contact to address employment, housing, educational and personal support goals in an integrated manner over a two-year period.<sup>35</sup>*

The project was described as the 'trail-blazing' by Chief Executive Officer of the Brotherhood of St Laurence, Tony Nicholson<sup>36</sup> and by YP4 researchers as 'probably the most ambitious attempt to join up and integrate public assistance for disadvantaged people in recent Australian history'.<sup>37</sup> The project has been established as a social experiment where by homeless young people are randomly assigned to the 'joined up' YP4 program (J group) or control group receiving a standard suite of services (S group). The test of this methodology requires statistically significant differences on the core outcomes of the trial. At the time of the NYC report such outcomes analysis was not available.

20.47 YP4 combines funding and other resources from SAAP, PSP, Job Network, JPET, and other programs and applies them more flexibly for young homeless jobseekers. A total funding of \$5,600,000 has been assembled from four government departments, two Commonwealth and two Victorian state departments, as well as \$1,500,000 from four philanthropic trusts. The three year trial commenced in 2005 and was due to finish sometime in 2008. A final evaluation report has been foreshadowed for 2009.

### **Issues with employment programs for homeless young people**

20.48 Getting and retaining a job is much more complex than having secure accommodation, and appropriate skills or work being available. Mission Australia (2006) has identified a participation continuum of nine complex and interrelated factors for social and economic participation of young people. These factors are:

- connectedness, either to family and/or peers and/or to the community;
- physical and mental well-being;
- social and emotional resilience;
- affordable and secure housing;
- appropriate education and training;



- employability skills such as communication skills, conflict skills, timetabling;
- rewarding and secure employment;
- financial security; and
- aspirations and goals.<sup>38</sup>

20.49 The issues of connectedness, accommodation, education and training and secure employment are significant problems for services seeking to assist homeless young people with employment.

### **Accommodation first?**

20.50 To date most assistance provided to homeless young people is predicated on the belief that securing safe accommodation is the main priority before education, training or employment options can be explored. This 'accommodation first' approach seems to be the accepted wisdom of most workers in SAAP, JPET and other youth services who spoke to the Inquiry. For example, the Inquiry was told:

*There is a lot of work that needs to be done with young people before they are ready for full employment and education. It is very, very hard to talk about employment with young people, especially when public transport is so bad. It is too hard to say let's get a job and then let's see where you end up living. You really have to stabilise the accommodation before you can look at securing employment for them.*<sup>39</sup>

20.51 Once accommodation is secured other issues can be addressed, provided the accommodation is:

*... safe accommodation, that's caring, that takes in the holistic view of their education and maybe start with getting them back into school or TAFE to finish their schooling and give them the support that they need ...*<sup>40</sup>

20.52 Other programs such as YP4, have attempted to address homelessness and unemployment concurrently. While it is too early to judge the success of the YP4 project evidence given to the Inquiry by YP4 staff claimed that some people were improving their situation through joined up service provision with some of their clients gaining employment (albeit temporary work) and improving their community connectedness.<sup>41</sup>

20.53 The Foyer Model (see Chapter 16), with links between accommodation and education, training and employment, may be an important solution to this dilemma.

### **Employment security**

20.54 Labour market statistics show that while young people are increasingly going into paid employment much of their work is short-term, part-time and casual. This has significant implications for services assisting homeless young people with employment. Hanover Welfare Services, for example, told the Inquiry that the 'casualisation' of the labour market:

*... raises some longer-term questions around the sustainability of employment outcomes for young people in these programs. ... Are they simply a case that young people are siphoning through a range of short-term casual jobs or does it give them enough*



*exposure to paid employment over an undefined period of time, that they will move into more and better paid jobs, more sustainable, longer-term jobs and the like?*<sup>42</sup>

20.55 Secure employment is essential to being able to maintain accommodation and prevent further periods of homelessness.

## **Link between education and employment**

20.56 The connection between education and employment is clear: people who have completed school have lower rates of unemployment than those who left school without completing year 12 or its equivalent. The Dusseldorp Skills Forum, in their analysis of youth labour markets, concluded that:

*It is clear that in the modern Australian economy, many young people without school completion or a Certificate III qualification are likely to face long-term disadvantages in the labour market.*<sup>43</sup>

20.57 Many witnesses appearing at hearings and in written submissions highlighted the difficulties homeless young people have had in remaining in school.<sup>44</sup> Many homeless young people drop out of school as other priorities take precedence and some are suspended or excluded for poor attendance and behavioural issues. Without links back into mainstream education or training many homeless or formerly homeless young people will continue to be disadvantaged in the labour market.

## **A renewed national effort on youth employment, education and training**

20.58 The Dusseldorp Skills Forum and the Australia Industry Group have identified that a unique set of factors exist in Australia at present - strong economic conditions, the need for a skilled workforce and an ageing population - which means it is possible and essential to engage all young Australians in learning or work. In calling for a sustained and coordinated approach, they have set out clear objectives for all Australian governments that every young person will:

- attain Year 12 or Certificate III level;
- be engaged in full-time work or learning, or a combination of these;
- be provided with the resources, and assisted to access the relationships and integrated pathways needed to achieve these outcomes.<sup>45</sup>

20.59 The Dusseldorp Skills Forum and the Australia Industry Group suggest 10 main reform areas, four of which are pertinent to assisting homeless or formerly homeless young people. These four are:

- second chance options for young adults to complete Year 12 or its equivalent;
- personal support or mentoring for every potential early school leaver to make a successful transition to further learning or work;
- improved teacher support and preparation for 'hard to teach' students; and
- an Indigenous presence in schools and support for Indigenous students and communities.<sup>46</sup>

## Findings and Recommendations

20.60 The importance of education and training to employment cannot be understated in the modern Australian economy. Unemployed young people need to develop skills relevant to the workplace but, unfortunately, many homeless young people drop out of school. Homeless young people are among those least able to take advantage of labour market opportunities by using employment services designed for the mainstream. For this reason, programs such as the Job Placement, Employment and Training Program provide a critical support for homeless young people. As a 'pre-employment' program it provides a vital link between homeless young people and the mainstream employment services of the Job Network.

### Recommendation 20.1:

**The NYC Inquiry recommends that foundation education, job preparation, training and job creation be embedded as part of the coordinated response to youth homelessness.**

### Recommendation 20.2:

**The NYC Inquiry recommends the Jobs Placement, Education and Training Program [JPET] be refocused as a pre-employment program to help homeless young people overcome the social barriers to their participation in education, training or employment, and expanded to more adequately reach the number of homeless young people who need this kind of assistance.**

20.61 Homeless young people need to stabilise their accommodation and other issues before employment can be considered. Further, once these are stabilised, additional supports may be needed to maintain young people in accommodation and provide assistance to find work or continue in education or training. The Foyer model, discussed in Chapter 16, links accommodation to education, training and employment in a way that the latter is the primary incentive.

### Recommendation 20.3

**The NYC Inquiry recommends that foundation education, job preparation, training and job creation be linked in a package to the provision of accommodation and support. This would include youth housing such as Foyer housing, or similar models, which need to be closely linked with SAAP services.**

### Recommendation 20.4

**The NYC Inquiry recommends that supported employment be available for up to two years for homeless or at-risk young people with high and/or complex needs. Supported employment would involve:**

- a case worker available to support both the young person and his/her employer;
- appropriate employer linked subsidies;
- a capacity to liaise with employers to negotiate job placements under the supported employment program.

## Recommendation 20.5

**The NYC Inquiry recommends that innovation funds be made available for the development of not-for-profit businesses that employ homeless young people and provide services and products to the general community. The primary purpose of these businesses would be to provide real employment experiences for at-risk and homeless young people, who are not ready for employment in the broader labour market.**

20.62 There is a consensus that a renewed national effort is required to achieve higher school completions (or equivalent) and full employment in the youth labour market. Technical education, adult campuses, flexible enrolment and alternative programs such as POEM (now known as Connections) provide a wider range of options and pathways. However, particular attention needs to be directed to the support required by the most disadvantaged young people, including homeless young people. Although most young people will leave school and make a successful transition into post-secondary education in TAFE, university or employment, requiring little or no assistance beyond what is currently available, there is a group who do need support and assistance. At the point of leaving, there is an opportunity to collect information and to monitor the issue of early school leaving as well as provide assistance. The idea of workers from outside the schools, who work closely with careers teachers to directly support young people moving into the labour market would position a network of support at a point where systemic contact with young people is still possible.

## Recommendation 20.6

**The NYC Inquiry recommends that the transitions of young people from school to post-school employment options be supported by a national case management program providing transition assistance on an individual needs basis.**

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# 21

There is no agreed common national approach for ensuring that communities have sufficient capacity to respond to homelessness and related issues. Different programs and departments use different geographical boundaries and community agencies often complain that combined funding is positive but encumbered with onerous financial accountability requirements to the different departments that dispense funds. The idea of ‘communities of services’ implies active community building with some resources devoted to facilitating better coordination of local systems. Informal youth networks exist in places, and some of them have survived without funding for many years. The Victorian School Focused Youth Service and the Queensland Youth Support Coordinators program have invested resources to build cooperative networks on the ground. The NYC, reiterating the stance taken in previous reports on the issue of community coordination, suggests that the best means of building cross-sectoral communities of services be investigated and trialled so a broader national initiative can be developed in the future.





## Chapter 21 | Community Coordination

21.1 One issue is whether services are in place and whether a community has sufficient youth services of various types to meet the needs of homeless young people. At the time of the Burdekin Report a major concern was the development of an adequate supported accommodation response however some attention was given to the challenge of coordination – or ensuring that services work together efficiently.

21.2 Burdekin's considered view on the basis of the evidence from youth services was that:

*... youth services throughout Australia – having experienced at least five years of operation in an essentially uncoordinated environment – are now ready to accept coordination mechanisms which, while they may involve radical changes to individual services will result in a more efficient and rational distribution of services according to need. Perhaps more importantly, the urgency of the problems faced by our homeless children demand it.*<sup>1</sup>

21.3 In order to operationalise what 'coordination' could mean, Burdekin went on to specify some of the requirements of coordination.

*Coordination mechanisms must be adequately funded for each region, and cooperation with the relevant mechanism must be a pre-requisite for funding approval. The tasks of each regional coordination mechanism should include:*

- Raising community awareness of the existence and needs of homeless children and other disadvantaged youth and stimulating community initiative and involvement;*
- Linking of services;*
- Monitoring needs in the region;*

- Establishing regional referral and data collection systems;
- Involving agencies in policy development;
- Facilitating regional consensus on service aims (consistent with national and state objectives) – including by promoting awareness and discussion of those objectives; and
- Supporting local coordination efforts.<sup>2</sup>

Coordination at this time was constructed among SAAP services linked with some other specialist services. Victorian regional coordination and networking amongst SAAP services, which continues to the present day, impressed the HREOC Commissioners at the time, but there was little else in the way of exemplars or models. The issues discerned earlier are still extant.

21.4 The Inquiry was told that the navigating the sector is difficult. In Geelong (Victoria), a health sector worker admitted that she found locating the right service a real challenge when working outside her own field:

*It is often even confusing to me as to who to contact ... for kind of crisis accommodation and that type of thing. So integration in that regard I think is really important ...*<sup>3</sup>

21.5 Cheryl Axleby described what Metropolitan Aboriginal Youth and Family Services could achieve through relationships with other services. In this instance, the discussion concerns strategies for dealing with Indigenous adolescent clients with mental health issues:

*We've got a partnership with the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service. ... we involved the CAMS workers to come into our programs and talk about mental health issues, to talk about counselling for sexual abuse type issues as well.*<sup>4</sup>

*... We consult with our CAMS agency and get a commitment from them to work with this young person. We have a priority of service that was part of the agreement of getting our young people through the system. There are on average six to eight week waits, even for a person who has suicidal tendencies. We have been able to negotiate that with CAMS. We have been building these relationships and partnerships so we can get better services for our young people.*<sup>5</sup>

21.6 In Sydney, the Inquiry heard from the Youth Drug and Alcohol Service (Sydney West Area Health Services), which offers an inpatient detoxification service, about the positive referral relationships it had formed with refugees:

*I guess one of the things that we've set out to do is to make very strong connections with youth refugees. So we have - a lot of our young people for instance, don't go to rehab, they go into medium care youth services and we work with those services and support the young person.*<sup>6</sup>

The service also maintains strong referral relationships with rehabilitation services for those young people who want to take that path. There are, however, young people who don't want to take that step.

21.7 Repeatedly, the Inquiry heard about the absence of robust, proactive coordina-

tion between services and across disciplines. In some cases this meant that, while services existed and workers did their jobs well, young people were not helped as effectively as they might be:

*I guess my thoughts around that would be in some cases very much because services operate, again in silos, there's not necessarily a lot of interaction particularly across portfolio areas, so if you work in a SAAP service and part of the SAAP sector and if you work in Reconnect then you are more likely to see it as part of your youth sector and they're different. The politic of that in the ACT is that they operate in those sectors and don't necessarily do a lot of collaboration across the two, but that also varies from service to service. So I guess the short answer would be that in some cases, individual services are doing fantastic work and it's really having a significant impact. Across the broader sector, there's not enough collaboration and I guess working together to a common goal around supporting young people to not fall through the gaps.<sup>7</sup>*

There was a widespread recommendation from the field that services need specific, targeted resources to coordinate cross-sector service provision.

21.8 The development of 'early intervention' in terms of Reconnect and other programs as well as SAAP and aspirations to achieve a 'whole of government' response as well as a 'continuum of services' raises the issue of coordination at several levels. One is how policy decisions and initiatives flowing from strategic policy decisions might be coordinated at the highest levels of the Federal Government between Commonwealth departments. Secondly, there is the issue of coordinating between the Commonwealth and the states and territories. While SAAP continued as a joint program in the past decade or so, the idea of joint program initiatives between a Liberal Federal Government and state and territory Labor governments was not encouraged and became a generally unwelcome idea for both sides. Thirdly, there is the problem of coordination on the ground in communities where young people and their families live. At this level, the various social programs have to work as well as possible for homeless young people.

21.9 The issue of coordination within the Federal Government and between the Commonwealth and the states and territories is dealt with in Chapter 24, where one proposal is a call for a long-term strategic plan on homelessness with the appropriate structures and processes, as well as political commitment to achieve objectives and targets that will effectively, to all intents and purposes, eliminate youth homelessness over 25 years. However 'youth homelessness' is the intersection of two policy areas – youth policy and homelessness policy. As well as attending to strategic actions on homelessness policy, there is also a need to reform the structures and policy processes for youth policy at Commonwealth and state levels.

21.10 Coordination at a community level presents a number of problems that have apparently been unresolvable since the Burdekin Report. Some services receive funding from different Commonwealth and state government departments for different components of their total service capacity to assist homeless young people. Each source of funding has different accountability requirements. Competitive tendering may be necessary when opening up new funding opportunities for a number of potential providers, but when applied as a *modus operandi* for all government funding, it tends to create a culture whereby cooperation is discouraged and unrewarded.

21.11 In many areas of Australia, youth services get together in semi-formal inter-agency networks to share experience, discuss issues and build relationships that foster linkages between them. Agencies at the community level probably do this better than could be expected on the basis of the lack of coordination between sectors and departments higher up.

21.12 The House of Representatives Report into Aspects of Youth Homelessness published in 1995, the year before a change of government federally, took considerable interest in the possibilities of cross-sectoral community coordination.

*Most regional areas have an inter-agency forum of some kind, coordinated by a variety of government or non-government agencies. There is little consistency across the country and there has been no attempt to determine 'best practice models'. The Committee gained the impression that successful regional coordination depended largely on the vision of particular individuals, combined with a sense of community cohesion amongst the welfare sector, as well as the development and support of senior administrators in key Commonwealth, State and non-government agencies.*<sup>8</sup>

In 2007, it was relatively easy to come across a loose regional or community network but rare to find a network which has been sustainable for a long period of time or constituted itself as a formal collaboration. Alan Morris and the House of Representatives committee in 1995 were impressed with the Hunter Regional Strategic Plan for the Provision of Youth Services (1994-1997) but there is little evidence that the impetus provided by community-wide planning has developed into any kind of sustainable structure or development process.

21.13 One network that has done so is BATForce in Geelong (Victoria). A notable feature of this network is that it has existed for more than 20 years and, has 200-plus member organisations, including schools and community agencies. The network has received some government funding over the past 16 years mainly for project work that involve local research and cross-agency planning. BATForce describes itself as:

*... the peak youth affairs body of the Barwon Region, strives to improve opportunities and choices for all young people, 10-25 years, by maintaining an informed impartial open network of youth, community sector agencies and schools, which advocates for the interests of young people and the network*<sup>9</sup>.

Its objectives are:

- *To ensure that all youth, community sector agencies and schools and individuals within these organisations have access to, and are encouraged to participate in, an informed, impartial, open network.*
- *To ensure that all youth, community sector agencies and schools and individuals within these organisations act collaboratively in the development of policies, planning and the provision of services.*
- *To raise awareness and advocate for the interests of young people and the service network*
- *To balance the competing demands of youth, community sector and schools, with a commitment to best use of resources, to produce the best possible outcomes for young people.*<sup>10</sup>

21.14 Various members and individuals come together under BATForce to collaboratively plan and take action on behalf of young people in the Barwon sub-region. The work being done on a common assessment and referral process was relatively atypical when compared to the level of cooperation in other areas:

*This is a significant process at the moment because we're looking at a common assessment referral process just to try and stop the referral merry-go-round that happens with so many clients. As you can well imagine, we are often dealing with stressed clients, and the last thing they need to do is to be sent to three agencies and tell that story three times over. So if we can have at least the basic information available across all the agencies, then hopefully the clients don't add to their stress.*<sup>11</sup>

21.15 Time for Youth in Geelong (Victoria) advised the Inquiry that while co-location had worked well in its region, it was not a complete answer to the challenge of community co-ordination:

*... the co-location of youth services around the youth precinct has been a real plus for young people because they can come in, with homelessness issues, as they do, but there are just tremendous links within this precinct for mental health services, the Clockwork health services, to the City of Greater Geelong, to support recreation services by youth workers, and indeed for the peak agency, BATForce, as well as diverse employment and training services. And then beyond that, each of those agencies has an extensive network of services. But, I would be telling fibs if I said we had this integration together within the Barwon Sector. There is a lot of networking and a lot of good relationships between the agencies and between agency workers, but in terms of integrated planning among the key agencies, particularly in the youth services area, it just doesn't happen.*<sup>12</sup>

21.16 Another example (circa 1994) was the Keeping in Touch with Schools (KITS) project led by Kathy Desmond and developed by the Homelessness Support Steering Committee which involved schools and community agencies<sup>13</sup>. The project was auspiced by the Eltham Community Health Centre and supported by the Shires of Eltham and Diamond Valley. Funding for the project came from the Victorian Department of Education and the Office for Youth Affairs. The project developed an exemplary strategic plan for how the community of agencies and schools would go about supporting homeless students in the area. The process was community development but the community was essentially a 'community of services'. Strong on community building, the project suffered initially from a lack of workers to work directly with at-risk students in schools. One of the learnings from this project was that community coordination also required a capacity to undertake practical support with young people and their families.

21.17 Regarded as a pioneering exemplar of both the Victorian School Focused Youth Service and as one of the notably successful pilot projects in the Prime Minister's Youth Homelessness Pilot, KITS contributed to the development of the Reconnect program model.

21.18 The Victorian School Focused Youth Service (SFYS) was established in 1998 following the suicide prevention taskforce, but the new program was always regarded as more generic than the issue, which served to release program funding. It is the only

example of a government program specifically designed to facilitate coordination and collaboration between schools and agencies.

21.19 The aim of SFYS is to develop an integrated service response for young people who are at risk of developing behaviours that may make them vulnerable to self-harm, disengagement from school, family or community or who are displaying behaviours which require support and intervention. Some 41 worker-facilitators are deployed throughout Victoria with the aim to:

- *Facilitate and strengthen collaborative structures and mechanisms between schools and the relevant youth and community services that support young people including welfare, health and mental health agencies.*
- *Provide linkages for schools and agencies which have a client base of young people and which directly support young people.*
- *Improve linkages, cohesiveness and integration of service provision for young people displaying “at risk” behaviours who require support and intervention.*
- *Purchase services to meet gaps in the current service system as identified at the local level with the secondary benefit of creating systemic change and/or the establishment of collaborative work practices.*

The outcomes sought by following these objectives are:

- *A significant improvement in addressing the needs of “at risk” young people as a result of functioning collaborative structures and mechanisms between schools and relevant community agencies.*
- *A significant improvement in the current service system as a result of the identification of gaps and subsequent service development and/or purchase.*<sup>14</sup>

21.20 Brokerage funds are available for local projects by agencies and schools with a view to achieving measures of ‘systemic change’ and improved outcomes for at-risk young people. SFYS is an example of an innovative program operated for nearly 10 years as a joint program by the Department of Education and Training and the Department of Human Services. Its recent transfer from human services to education seems to this Inquiry to be problematic and place the long-term future of the program in some doubt.

21.21 School Focus Youth Service provides much of the practice experience on community coordination of youth services and youth support. The involvement of schools, and the emphasis on links and co-operation between schools and community agencies, is a major strength, which distinguishes this initiative from other youth services networks which tend to organise apart from the education system. The program has probably always been too stretched in terms of the number of schools and agencies a worker was expected to work with and would have needed some 70 workers to achieve realistic community-based coverage. Also, facilitation of initiatives and relationships but not so much new structures and sustainable community processes was what this program appears to have done well. The name seems an unfortunate choice, being somewhat misleading. Nonetheless, the SFYS program is an innovative example based on recognition that community building requires resources.

21.22 During the hearings, the development of Headspace was drawn to the NYC's attention. Headspace is funded by the Australian Government under the Promoting Better Mental Health – Youth Mental Health Initiative. The Headspace *raison d'être* was stated as follows:

*The Communities of Youth Services strategy is focused on building the capacity of local communities to identify early, and provide effective responses to young people aged 12-25 with mental health and related substance use disorders. It will require the reform of local service systems, planning and local implementation of community awareness campaigns, and service provider education and training.*

21.23 Annette Jarvis from the Riverina Division of General Practice described what a consortium of agencies in the Riverina area centred on Wagga Wagga had undertaken under the program umbrella of Headspace. The consortium received \$35,000 to develop a proposal for major funding. She described:

*... one approach to deal with youth in terms of their mental health, co-morbidities, homelessness, education and other things that are dealt with up to the age of 24. So what we've been doing is actually working on this idea around a 'community of youth services', and that means that youth are able to enter the service through any organisation that they would normally feel happy to access. However, once they are in the system, they are then able to move around within that system and get the help that they need and they would be case managed by the most appropriate provider who is the lead case manager.*<sup>15</sup>

Some of the features of this model were:

- A coordinator linking all the agencies together;
- A consortia responsible for governance;
- Monthly or bi-weekly case management meetings;
- Young people as health promotion officers;
- A distinctive logo and identity;
- A community of services website;
- Common assessment tool used by all agencies; and
- A youth card like a Medicare card for young people.

Other service providers in Wagga Wagga independently talked about the 'community of services' concept being developed under Headspace providing convincing evidence of genuine collaboration.

21.24 It is too early to know if the cross-sectoral 'community of services' concept will achieve sustainable collaboration and coordination at a community level. Headspace is funded from mental health funds and has raised the issue about services working in close co-operation. However, sustainable cross-sectoral coordination has not been achieved with funds from one sector or department except on a single project basis. Other feedback on Headspace suggests that not all projects are as broadly oriented as the services in Wagga Wagga, preferring in some cases a narrower mental health or drug response orientation. Given that all sectors of activity benefit, this raises the issue of how



cross-sectoral coordination funding might be packaged for communities with buy in from several departments. Building 'communities of services' is a long-range task that needs to be thought of as community infrastructure and receive development as well as maintenance funding.

21.25 The notion of 'communities of services' as suggested in this chapter, raises the long-range issue of building infrastructure. The 'communities of services' concept will involve supporting collaboration amongst services and community organisations. The potential role of peak bodies in assisting that self-organisation and development should be recognised and supported as part of the funded process of community building. Departments have sometimes been ambivalent about peak bodies, particularly when disagreements have arisen, however, the history of Government to non-government relations has more often been cooperative. A mature approach would be to foster the self-organisation of service providers at the community level, but also at other levels within the states and territories and across the nation. The NYC's suggestion is that consideration be given to resourcing peaks in the homelessness field to play a more prominent role in the building of the proposed 'community of services' infrastructure. Another way would be for states and territories to fund positions in regions or even sub-regions for experienced practitioners to take on roles as 'SAAP Networkers' (to use a Victorian term) or a service and community development. It is in the interest of the departments, which often have small staff teams, to facilitate as much professional development, service provision development and cross-service cooperation as possible.

## Conclusions and Recommendations

21.26 The problem of building 'communities of services' remains. Regional constructs have been used to provide a degree of support to services from departments. However, bureaucratic constructs are not communities that young people and their families identify with or navigate with a sense of familiarity. The closest boundary-to-real-life communities are Local Government Areas. Some LGAs, such as Brisbane, may seem too big but others are too small. However, LGAs mostly provide a more human level on which to coordinate and build actual sustainable local 'communities of services'. The refocusing on 'communities of services' will provide a way to pay closer attention to 'need' but it is also likely to yield efficiencies over time as services are invested with more responsibility for working together to respond to issues.

### Recommendation 21.1

The NYC Inquiry recommends that the Commonwealth Government, together with the state and territory governments, develop a 'community of services' model to support community level coordination and cross-sectoral collaboration across all issues affecting young people. This would need to involve all community sector stakeholders, including schools, in a sustainable network of youth services.

### Recommendation 21.2

The NYC Inquiry recommends that the Commonwealth Government in cooperation with state and territory governments undertake a community youth coordination model research and



development project. The project would:

- Survey comprehensively all initiatives on coordination of youth services;
- Undertake model development workshops with agencies and schools;
- Develop a theoretical model for a sustainable 'community of services';
- Consider how recurrent cross-sectoral department funding could be applied to a national network of LGA-based 'community of services' approach;
- Advise on the budgetary implications of developmental funds and the recurrent funding that would be required to support a viable 'community of services' network at the local level.

## ENDNOTES

- 1 Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (1989) Our homeless children, report of the national inquiry into homeless children, Australian Government Publishing Service, Canberra.
- 2 Ibid.
- 3 M. O'Shea, Jigsaw Young Persons Health Service, Geelong Day 1, 26-03-2007.
- 4 C. Axleby, Metropolitan Aboriginal Youth and Family Services, Adelaide Day 15, 26-04-2007.
- 5 Ibid.
- 6 G. Pringle, Youth Drug and Alcohol Service, Sydney West Area Health Services, Sydney Day 9, 17-04-2007.
- 7 J. Irwin, Anglicare Canberra and Goulburn, Canberra Day 11, 19-04-2007.
- 8 House of Representative Standing Committee on Community Affairs (1995) A report on aspects of youth homelessness, Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia, Australian Government Publishing Service, Canberra, p. 371.
- 9 BATFORCE Aims and Objectives, [www.batforce.org.au/main.shtml](http://www.batforce.org.au/main.shtml)
- 10 Ibid.
- 11 M. Douglas, Barwon Youth, Geelong Day 1, 26-03-2007.
- 12 M. Kelly, Tim for Youth, Geelong Day 1, 26-03-2007.
- 13 Desmond, K. (1994) KITS Strategy Plan, Eltham, Victoria: Eltham Community Health Centre.
- 14 Victorian Department of Human Services and Department of Education and Training (1998) School Focused Youth Service: Program Guidelines, Melbourne: Victorian Government.
- 15 Annette Jarvis, Riverina Division of General Practice, Wagga Wagga Day 10, 18-04-2007.



# 22

Cost-benefit and cost-effectiveness information about youth homelessness is limited in Australia. Pinkney and Ewing (1998) estimated that the long-term economic cost to the community, of not assisting the estimated 25,000 students who experience homelessness in a year would be 'in excess of half a billion dollars per year'. The largest part of this estimated amount is the cost of educational disadvantage, supplemented by the costs to the community of ill-health and involvement in the criminal justice system. Pinkney and Ewing estimated a cost-benefit break-even point where only one in five young people are successfully helped to avoid long-term homelessness. Using the same methodology, but considering the 50,000 children who pass through SAAP services each year, the long-term cost to Australia of not successfully assisting young people to avoid homelessness might be closer to \$1 billion per year. The average cost of prevention and early intervention for families and children was \$3,079 per family, compared to the \$3,130 unit cost for SAAP, which, if capital and maintenance of housing costs are included, could be as high as \$8,500. On the existing evidence, actual budget costs to government of redressing homelessness are considerably less than the long-term cost to the community of not doing so. Providing prevention and early intervention measures for young people or families is cheaper than the assistance required once they have become homeless.



## Chapter 22 | Costs and benefits

### Introduction

22.1 The Burdekin Report raised the issue of the costs and benefits of addressing homelessness. The report divided costs into those incurred by the homeless individual and those incurred by the community. The economic cost to the community included direct government outlays, the consequences of homelessness suffered by other members of the community (for example victims of crime), and the direct and indirect costs of housing, medical and health costs, community services and training incurred by Federal and state governments.<sup>1</sup> Although the report did not provide a dollar figure it noted:

*While federal government outlays on income support for homeless youth are relatively small in magnitude the potential long-term impact on social security outlays that results directly from homelessness is likely to be substantial.*<sup>2</sup>

22.2 Jan Carter, one of the three HREOC Commissioners commented further in 1990 on the economic consequence of inaction on youth homelessness. She noted that the greatest benefit of reducing youth homelessness is the increased participation of youth in communities and that although reducing youth homelessness increased government expenditure in the short run, over the longer term it could reduce child protection expenditure and lead to higher productivity.<sup>3</sup> Dixon, who advised the HREOC inquiry, also discussed this issue. He argued the greatest cost to the community from homelessness was the loss of taxation revenue due to unemployment or underemployment.<sup>4</sup>

### Cost-benefit?

22.3 Governments commonly use cost-benefit analysis to decide whether to make a change in a public policy or program. Cost-benefits analysis compares the cost of a change with projected benefits of making the change. This comparison is achieved by adding up all the values of the benefits of the change and subtracting the costs of imple-

menting the change. If the result is positive (i.e. if the benefits are greater than the cost) then the change is financially viable.

## **Cost effectiveness?**

22.4 Cost-effectiveness undertakes a financial analysis of the practices and policies used to achieve a desired outcome (e.g. reduce youth homelessness) in order to calculate the cost-effectiveness of interventions, models of practice or social programs. This usually entails identifying desired outcomes and comparing strategies that affect these outcomes. For example, effective early intervention for young people at risk of homelessness would mean that they may then avoid the use of services that would otherwise be needed if no intervention was provided (such as entering SAAP services or the public housing system).

## **Cost efficiency?**

22.5 Cost-efficiency allows comparisons of costs on the basis of achieving a desired outcome of different locations or methods of a program. For example, a cost-efficiency analysis of the Reconnect program would consider delivery costs and service usage costs for the program at various locations as well as make comparisons across the entire program.

22.6 Although, there has been relatively little done on the costs and benefits of homelessness programs in the past 20 years, this chapter is able to draw upon three cost-benefit Australian studies. Assessing the long-term costs and benefits of programs and their cost-effectiveness and cost-efficiency is important to ensure that publicly funded programs work well for homeless people and for the broader community. Cost-benefit analyses can inform public policy decisions and provide supporting arguments for long-term expenditure.

22.7 In methodological terms, there have been several different measures used to evaluate homelessness programs: cost-benefit analyses, as well as cost-efficiency and cost-effectiveness measures. While cost-efficiency issues are important for program planners in government departments, this Inquiry was more concerned about the long-term economic consequences of homelessness policy and programs, i.e. cost-benefit considerations, and how well certain measures are working, i.e. cost-effectiveness.

22.8 Homelessness prevention programs are difficult to evaluate because they are successful when something does not happen. If the program is successful in preventing homelessness then the cost associated with homelessness is avoided, leading to questions about how best to measure costs that are not incurred. Cost-effectiveness attempts to analyse and compare which practices and policies best reduce the incidence of homelessness. A number of recent studies have applied cost-effective analyses to homelessness programs.<sup>5</sup>

22.9 In order to undertake any cost-benefit and cost-effectiveness analysis an accurate estimate of program costs and outcomes is essential. The costs incurred in homelessness programs can typically be broken down into three broad categories:

- the cost of administering the program

- program delivery costs
- costs to service users.

22.10 A confounding factor in the calculation of the cost of homelessness remediation programs is that the homelessness service system bears the costs of the failure of other systems.

## Early intervention programs – cost-benefits

22.11 Daryl Dixon outlined the arguments of the HREOC report on the issue of the costs and benefits of ameliorating homelessness. In 1998, Pinkney and Ewing on the basis of better data on homelessness undertook a more detailed economic evaluation of the costs of youth homelessness<sup>6</sup> using existing statistical information and made assumptions about what happened over time. They pointed out that measures of program outcome might well underestimate the consequences of homelessness for individuals. One reason for this could be the difficulties of quantifying in dollar terms the many variables influencing the cost to individuals. There are also formidable practical problems in gathering good data on the homeless population. In addition, the members of the homeless youth population are diverse so the benefits accruing from supporting individual homeless young people will necessarily differ.

22.12 There are two other recent economic analyses of early intervention programs for families at risk of homelessness. The first was by Dr Paul Flatau who headed an AHURI study of the Supported Housing Assistance Program (SHAP) in Western Australia. The second was contained in the evaluation report of the Australian Government HOME Advice Program. Although these studies are not about homeless young people, they do provide some relevant analysis of homelessness early intervention programs.

22.13 Despite some points of difference, the HOME Advice Program and SHAP in Western Australia are both early intervention programs for families at risk of becoming homeless, including young families. SHAP is a program aimed at assisting public housing tenants who are at risk of eviction. SHAP services are provided by non-government agencies funded by the WA Department of Housing and Works. The services assist families to improve their housekeeping and budgeting skills, and to deal with domestic violence, child abuse, drug and alcohol problems and mental illness. Participation is voluntary. The HOME Advice Program provides open-ended housing support, financial assistance, advocacy, relationship support, family health and wellbeing support using a family-centred, strength-based model.<sup>7</sup>

22.14 Flatau reported an average cost per client for SHAP services of \$3,300.<sup>8</sup> The cost per family of the HOME Advice Program ranged from \$1,323 to \$3,436.<sup>9</sup> The cost of becoming homeless and entering SAAP services was found to be significantly higher than the cost of these programs. The average unit cost for SAAP was \$3,130, which could be closer to the Western Australian figure of \$4,551 if a building component for crisis support were added in and possibly as high as \$8,500 if the full costs of capital infrastructure were added in. Information on unit costs was not well-developed at the time of this inquiry.<sup>10</sup>

## Homelessness cost-offsets

22.15 Numerous indirect consequences may result from people being on a homelessness support program. If a homelessness program improves mental health, financial stability or employment outcomes, then the use of emergency medical services and criminal justice services is likely to fall, resulting in lower government outlays in those areas.<sup>11</sup> These government savings are sometimes called ‘cost-offsets’. If a housing support program results in a long-term reduction in the homeless population, then the cost of providing expensive crisis accommodation should also reduce. The reduced costs of these services have been found to significantly offset the cost of housing provision.<sup>12</sup> These indirect impacts or ‘cost-offsets’, can be calculated and should be included in any analysis of the costs and benefits of homelessness programs. Cost-offsets are calculated as the reduction in the cost of service delivery discounted to capture an estimate of the ongoing impact of future service usage.

22.16 On the other hand, it has been argued that people receiving housing assistance may increase their use of services such as health or welfare benefits due to greater knowledge and facilitated access to them. The counter-argument is that if the increased consumption of benefits includes education and employment services, this might ultimately result in a net contribution to the Australian economy.

22.17 It is important to consider the cost of non-housing-related services used by homeless young people and those at risk of becoming homeless compared with the general population. The report by Flatau et al. provides estimates of usage by homeless persons and those at risk of becoming homeless taken from a quantitative survey of clients from a number of agencies catering for homeless and at-risk clients. Flatau’s estimates of cost-offsets are categorised as related either to health or the criminal justice system.<sup>13</sup>

22.18 The relationship between health and homelessness has been highlighted in several Australian studies<sup>14</sup> and was discussed in Chapter 17 of this report. The evidence provided to the Inquiry by witnesses across Australia indicates that young homeless people experience significant health problems that compound the difficulties they face.

22.19 Witnesses submitted evidence to the Inquiry suggesting high and increasing levels of problematic alcohol and other drug use in the young homeless population. The evidence in relation to alcohol and other drug use was discussed in Chapter 11.

22.20 Higher consumption of drugs and alcohol among the homeless youth population has several implications. Firstly, the greater use of drugs may result in higher mortality and morbidity although how much higher than the rest of the population is difficult to quantify. Secondly, drug dependence has often been associated with petty crime the cost of which can be calculated in terms of loss to property owners in terms of property stolen, the cost of providing security for dwellings, insurance costs, and police and court time. Thirdly, there is also an increased risk of the transmission of communicable diseases such as STDs, and Hepatitis B and C.

22.21 Ill-health not only reduces the productivity of labour through reduced direct production and premature death, but the community also bears the cost of treating those who are ill as a result of homelessness. Reduced productivity and production due to illness is difficult to quantify because of the lack of data on mortality and morbid-



ity rates for homeless versus non-homeless persons. However, as an indication of these costs Antioch et al. estimated the morbidity cost of Hepatitis B in terms of the '...value of goods and services not produced' in Australia in 1989 – 1990 at \$1.1 million and a present value of the lifetime earnings lost by those who died from this disease in 1989 – 1990 of \$4.9 million or \$200,000 per person.<sup>15</sup> Morbidity and mortality costs resulting from the chronic sequelae of Hepatitis B were an additional \$23.5 million.<sup>16</sup> Hence the total morbidity and mortality cost of this one disease in 1989 – 1990 was estimated to be about \$30 million.

22.22 The important question is what is the additional cost of medical and health care for homeless young people over the average member of the community? Pinkney and Ewing proposed that young homeless people under-use public medical services, tend not to seek treatment, cannot afford medication and due to the transitory nature of their predicament are seldom able to obtain follow up consultations.<sup>17</sup> However, the real cost to the community is the impact of the untreated illness or disease.

22.23 While there was no direct calculation of the difference in health cost between homeless and non-homeless individuals, Pinkney and Ewing assumed a 50 per cent increase in health deterioration and cost for the rest of the lives of students entering chronic homelessness (more than one year). For students entering long-term homelessness (several months) they assumed a 50 per cent higher health cost for a two-year period. They measured cost using per capita health care expenditure for 1992-1993 as a proxy for the cost of health deterioration, a method that yields a very conservative estimate of cost. Nevertheless Pinkney and Ewing estimated that the total direct health cost of failing to intervene with the estimated 12,500 homeless students nationally in 1994 was about \$70 million.<sup>18</sup>

22.24 The relationship between crime and homelessness was discussed in Chapter 18 Crime and Legal Issues. In terms of youth homelessness, Pinkney and Ewing noted that some young people leave home after becoming involved with the police.<sup>19</sup> However, there is a significant body of evidence to indicate that offending is widespread within the homeless youth population. As was discussed in Chapter 18, crime is often committed by homeless young people out of necessity, simply to eat and/or support a drug habit.

22.25 There are no studies that directly estimate the criminal justice costs for the homeless community per se in comparison to the rest of the community. There is some indirect evidence - Alder et al, in a survey of Western Australian police officers, found that street kids were considered to be the most difficult group of young people to deal with.<sup>20</sup> According to Pinkney and Ewing, in 1994 Victorian police processed homeless young people (aged between 14 and 24) at a rate approximately 10 times the rest of the youth population. A very conservative estimate proposed by Pinkney and Ewing was that:

*If we compare...homeless youngsters appear at least twice as likely to be apprehended for a criminal offence.*<sup>21</sup>

22.26 While this judgement should be interpreted with some caution as higher rates of offending by homeless people may indicate their higher visibility to police and the criminalisation of homelessness, the costs relating to youth homelessness do not seem to be limited to criminal offending. Anecdotal evidence from police indicates that in

certain regions a not insignificant amount of police time and resources is consumed in caring for and finding temporary accommodation for homeless persons. A reduction in homelessness through early intervention would free valuable police time to pursue other more pressing matters. It should also be noted that the benefits of reduced homelessness could reduce the costs to the criminal justice system well into the future.

22.27 A direct measurement of the cost-offsets involved in the health and criminal justice systems from homelessness amelioration programs is not possible. However, Flatau et al. provided estimates of cost offsets of homeless families versus the general population in the health and criminal justice systems.<sup>22</sup> This involved estimating the unit costs of delivering a range of health and justice services using service utilisation rates of various client cohorts and for the population in general. Top-down unit costs for a number of government services are published in the Productivity Commission SCRGSP Annual Report on Government Service Provision, Australian Institute of Housing and Welfare (AIHW) publications and Police Annual reports. These sources also publish service utilisation rates for the population. Although top-down unit costs are not ideal, Pinkney and Ewing indicated that they are the most likely source of such data for Australian researchers. One of the limitations of the published unit cost and service utilisation data they used in their study is that it is neither all from a common time period nor calculated regularly, hence the need to adjust past dollar figures for inflation.

22.28 The results of the year-long client survey reported in Flatau et al. showed differences in service usage between people accessing homelessness prevention services and the general population. Client survey data was used to determine service use over the previous year. In most instances the unit cost and population use of health and justice services is for Western Australia only. On average 43.9 per cent of survey respondents reported suffering mental illness and 20.7 per cent expressed concern regarding their drug and alcohol consumption. This compares with population averages of 18 per cent of people experiencing mental health problems<sup>23</sup>, 9.9 per cent drinking alcohol at levels that risk harm and 6.2 per cent of people surveyed in the 2004 National Drug Strategy Household Survey reporting using illicit drugs in the previous week.<sup>24</sup> These differences suggest that even with housing assistance the average client use of other government services is unlikely to be similar to the general population. This comparison was for the homeless population using SAAP services, not just young people, where the differences might well be greater.

22.29 Flatau et al. calculated an average cost of both health and justice services used by SHAP clients, which exceeded the population average. For example, the higher frequency of hospital visits reported by clients compared with the population adds \$8,464 per year for SHAP clients to the government cost of health services. The total health and criminal justice offsets are \$10,643 and \$2,541 respectively. These are annual figures and not indicative of the long-term impact which homelessness has. The discounted present value of the total health and criminal justice offsets, referred to as Average Life Outcomes is \$332,315 per person. This would be conservative for young people as it is calculated over a 45-year period and at a three per cent discount rate.

22.30 These figures can be compared with estimates made by Pinkney and Ewing and republished in the HOME Advice Evaluation report. Starting with per capita health costs published by the ABS it was assumed that young people experiencing chronic

homelessness would encounter a 50 per cent increase in health deterioration and subsequent health costs for the rest of their lives. Those experiencing long-term homelessness are assumed to incur a 50 per cent increase in health deterioration and health costs for a two-year period. An increase in health related costs of young people expected to enter long term and chronic homelessness was estimated at \$2,120 per person per annum. This translates to a net present value of \$51,987 for each of the estimated 1,438 chronically homeless young people and \$4,057 for each of the 5,750 long-term homeless young people. The total cost of this deterioration in health was reported to be \$98,060,207.

22.31 Once again calculations can be done for the cost of homeless young people in families relating to their involvement in the criminal justice system. Potas et al. estimates that the cost of juvenile crime was at least \$1.5 billion in 1986-87.<sup>25</sup> This figure was adjusted for inflation. An estimate of five times the incident of involvement by chronic and long-term homeless young people in the criminal justice system and number of years that involvement lasts (five years for chronically homeless young people and two years for long-term homeless young people) was been taken from Pinkney and Ewing.<sup>25</sup> The increase in criminal justice costs for young people in families expected to enter long term and chronic homelessness was estimated to be \$1,392 and \$5,569 respectively per annum. The estimated present value of the involvement of young people in the criminal justice system of was \$51,977,402 [this figure depends on numbers of homeless people in each category].

22.32 The above analysis of cost-offsets focuses on the direct impact on government outlays resulting from reductions in homelessness. There are, however, other benefits from a reduction in homelessness and while many of these flow to the beneficiaries of the program, others benefit the community as a whole. Such benefits include:

- Reduced social security payments and welfare assistance;
- Lower insurance premiums;
- Lower costs in home and property security;
- Improvement in the quality and amenity of life for the community and individuals involved;
- Reduced risk of disease transmission;
- Reduced truancy;
- Benefits to landlords/public housing authorities;
- Savings from reduced informal support by family and friends;
- Reduced numbers of homeless persons and families;
- Reduced demand for emergency, assisted and publicly funded accommodation;
- Greater family and social cohesiveness.

22.33 The assignment of dollar values to many of these benefits is difficult. Nevertheless these are important and tangible benefits that should be recognised in any analysis of homelessness programs.

22.34 Following Darryl Dixon's point, Pinkney and Ewing noted that earlier studies of the economic impact of homelessness amelioration programs focused on expenditure

by government in income support and lost tax revenue.<sup>27</sup> They propose that the more fundamental costs of homelessness relate to reduced production (and resulting lost tax revenue) rather than increased financial outlay. Citing Perkins, they note that:

*In essence undertaking an economic analysis involves all project input costs and output benefits in such a way that they reflect the true cost to the economy of using inputs required and the true benefits to the country of the output produced by the project.*<sup>28</sup>

22.35 Hence, Pinkney and Ewing noted that purely focusing on measuring costs in financial expenditure terms has three key limitations. Firstly, this approach focuses only on those outlays by the public sector. However, the real benefit to the community of reduced homelessness is the total value of work done by those re-engaging with the workforce. Pinkney and Ewing say this benefit can be 'represented by the worker's wage' but even this approach understates the real contribution to the economy.<sup>29</sup> Wages paid, even if they include on-costs, do not necessarily equal the value of production added to the economy. Secondly, they argued that transfer payments are not a net loss to the economy but rather shift spending power from one section of the community to another. Accordingly, the improvement in community welfare arises when recipients value income more highly than taxpayers. However, in an economic sense, shouldn't the question be whether the recipient makes a greater return on investment than the government if the funds were invested in the next most valued use? A third problem with the outlays approach is that the less money allocated and paid, the lower the take-up rates by recipients and the less the cost of homelessness recorded. The fact that homeless individuals do not receive a full measure of public funds is seen as a positive in budgetary terms.

22.36 A direct and obvious consequence of homelessness is the reduced production and productivity through unemployment, underemployment and other labour market disadvantages caused by educational disadvantage. Homelessness makes gaining and maintaining steady employment difficult, in the same way that it makes it difficult for students to continue their studies and reach their full potential (see Chapter 8 Labour Market Marginalisation).

22.37 The relationship between youth homelessness, lack of skills and work experience, premature school leaving and unemployment was highlighted by Pinkney and Ewing. The chance of being unemployed and length of unemployment relate to the level of education. Further, there is an increased likelihood of unemployment remaining throughout the person's working life. For those who find work, educational disadvantage from a low educational achievement results in significantly lower lifetime wages.<sup>30</sup> People with a tertiary degree have as much as a 60 per cent higher mean wage than those who left school at 18 or under. Chamberlain and Mackenzie have estimated that in any given year around two-thirds to three-quarters of students who become homeless do not complete the school year.<sup>31</sup> Pinkney and Ewing estimated that in 1994 approximately 16,500 young people dropped out of school and that 60 per cent of these students would have completed year 12 if not for becoming homeless. Further, they note that unemployment rates for those who have not completed year 12 are significantly higher than for those who complete year 12.<sup>32</sup> While many school leavers return to school few complete year 12. Pinkney and Ewing proposed that a generally accepted figure is that leaving school before completing Year 12 reduces future earnings by 10 per cent.<sup>33</sup>

## Findings and Recommendations

22.38 Following broadly the methodology used by Pinkney and Ewing and the HOME Advice Program Evaluation report, the potential economic cost due to educational disadvantage for young people becoming homeless can be estimated. Given the fall in unemployment since this study and the skills shortage in many sectors of the economy this approach becomes more acceptable than it was when first done in 1998. Average annual earnings figures for 2006 were used (from ABS data). For the estimated 25,000 homeless young people (aged 12 to 18) as at the census date in 2001 the total lifetime earnings lost by not completing Year 12 were estimated to be \$642.7 million while total earnings lost from forgoing tertiary education was an additional estimated \$321.3 million. Together these two figures give a total cost of forgoing education by young people in homeless families of \$964.0 million. Even if only 20 per cent of the young people in homeless families dropped out of school this would reduce earnings from not completing year 12 by \$128.5 million and from forgoing tertiary education by \$64.3 million, giving a total lost value of production of \$192.8 million.

22.39 While programs such as HOME Advice and SHAP are not specifically targeted at young people they provide an indication of the range of costs that such programs incur. As stated above, their costs range from \$1,323 to \$3,436. Taking the figures from Flatau et al. and the conservative estimates of long-term homelessness as developed by Pinkney and Ewing, estimates of cost-offsets for criminal justice range from \$1,392 to \$2,541 and for health from \$4,057 to \$10,643. Thus, cost offsets in the justice and health systems well and truly exceed program costs. Once the cost offsets and benefits associated with other systems are taken into account, e.g. the educational disadvantage which homelessness brings and its resulting impact on lost productivity of the nation, the benefits associated with homelessness programs are overwhelming financially positive.

22.40 The cost-benefit arguments documented in this chapter draw on analysis done in 1998 by Pinkney and Ewing and more recent work done in 2006-7 on families at-risk of homelessness. Clearly, there is a need to undertake more studies of cost effectiveness and assemble cost-benefit data. However, there is sufficient work done in this area to inform the argument for prevention and early intervention in response to youth homelessness. A critical issue is to what extent the program response reaches the need among young people.

### Recommendation 22.1

**The NYC Inquiry recommends that national policy on youth homelessness address the unmet need for early intervention and prevention responses for at-risk and homeless young people.**

### Recommendation 22.2

**The NYC Inquiry recommends that a longitudinal cost-benefit study of homeless young people be undertaken.**

## Recommendation 22.3

**The NYC Inquiry recommends that an independent cost-effectiveness study be undertaken of the different models of early intervention for homeless young people and their families as well as supported accommodation for young people in SAAP.**

## ENDNOTES

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# 23

At the time of the NYC Inquiry, there was research evidence that youth homelessness had decreased somewhat from 2001 to 2006 due to early intervention. However, in 2006 and 2007 the affordability of housing became a major issue as private rents steeped dramatically and vacancy rates reached record lows. The NYC Inquiry in 2007-08 took place at a watershed point. Homelessness has been highlighted by the new Federal Government as a priority issue for action under the policy rubric of 'social inclusion'. If the right policy settings are put in place and there is sustained investment and growth across a continuum of measure from prevention, to early intervention, crisis intervention and then post-vention reconnection to community, it is possible to change the face of 'youth homelessness' in Australia. The NYC urges a constructivist approach, an appropriately robust and sufficiently bipartisan structure and process equal to the tasks that will need to be tackled over the long-term. The NYC proposes a ROADMAP of 'must do' 10 strategic actions - a national framework and a national plan of action; a refocus of service provision to building capacity in 'communities of services' with actual communities across Australia; increased affordable housing for young people; an expanded Reconnect early intervention response for at-risk young people; prevention of homelessness for families and children; a national reform agenda for care and protection; supported accommodation in communities; new models and funded cooperative links between specialist health, drug and alcohol and employment services; a new Foyer-like form of youth housing and, finally, post-vention support for young people re-establishing their lives in the community.



## Chapter 23 | The Way Forward

23.1 The history of youth homelessness policy and programs in Australia goes back to the early 1980s when most notable national initiative was the creation of the Supported Accommodation and Assistance Program. A joint Commonwealth- states program commenced in 1985. SAAP evolved from several other programs that already existed. SAAP includes a wide range of models of service provision for providing support to homeless people and supported accommodation. A fifth SAAP agreement was signed for the period 2005-2010.

23.2 Each SAAP agreement was accompanied by a stated agenda for reform and change, and, under SAAP IV, there was an Australian Government National Homelessness Strategy (NHS). The aims of the NHS<sup>1</sup> were to:

- Provide a strategic framework that will improve collaboration and linkages between existing programmes and services, to improve outcomes for clients and reduce the incidence of homelessness;
- Identify best practice models, which can be promoted and replicated, that will enhance existing homelessness policies and programmes;
- Build the capacity of the community sector to improve linkages and networks; and
- Raise awareness of the issue of homelessness throughout all areas and levels of government and in the community.

The NHS 2005-06 budget allocated \$10 million over four years towards demonstration projects and communication activity. In the 2005-07 budget round there were eight demonstration projects and five communication activities and in the 2007-09 round there were seven demonstration projects and six communication projects. The NHS

projects funded were all innovative initiatives that could in theory be replicated and used throughout Australia. However, clearly the nomenclature 'National Homelessness Strategy' was a misnomer – the NHS was a small program to divvy up funds for one off projects<sup>2</sup>. While useful, this was far from a national strategy for dealing with homelessness.

23.3 A national strategy implies a long-term shared vision about the desired improved state to be achieved. It offers long-, medium- and short-term aims, along with credible, well-reasoned strategies for achieving those aims and explicit, measurable targets so that progress or regress can be monitored. The clear need for a coordinated strategy has been established in the debates about climate change and water, and likewise a similar approach is needed to achieve social policy objectives. In terms of how the various jurisdictions cooperate on issues related to the environment there are Commonwealth-state ministerial councils, such as the national Environment Protection Council etc.

23.4 Social issues and problems in Australia have received separate, dislocated responses. Although it is widely known that for many people issues and crises occur simultaneously, there is no concerted, sophisticated approach to working across departments and sectors on these social issues. However, no less commitment and robust methodology should be applied to social problems such as 'youth homelessness' than to other big issues faced by the nation. The Australian people expect their governments and NGOs to care and act, rationally and compassionately, to redress the issues of young Australians who do not share in national prosperity – youth who have suffered the effects abuse, neglect, extreme conflict and family breakdown, in some cases, for many, many years

23.5 One of the most significant innovations to emerge under SAAP IV was the choice by several state jurisdictions to seek a more strategic approach to dealing with homelessness. These homelessness strategies were not a planned outcome or one of the strategic issues under SAAP IV. However, Victoria, Western Australia, Queensland and the ACT developed homelessness strategies in order to achieve social policy objectives over the longer-term. A somewhat different approach was taken by South Australia, which set up a Social Inclusion Unit following the UK model, but homelessness became a priority. Queensland has taken new initiatives on young people who are homeless, or at-risk, under a Responding to Homelessness framework.

23.6 In the Victorian Homelessness Strategy, the final report framed five strategic objectives:

- improving client focus and client outcomes;
- developing integrated and sustainable service responses;
- working across government and the community to prevent homelessness;
- increasing access to and supply of affordable housing;
- supporting and driving change.

The Victorian strategy was accompanied by funding for some additional crisis services. From 2000-2002, Victoria contributed 40 per cent over and above the funding the state was obliged to under the Commonwealth-state bilateral agreement. Over the same pe-

riod the Transitional Housing Management program was extended by 600 properties. A new Ministerial Advisory Committee was developed along with an Inter-departmental Committee as it was recognised that 'to address the myriad of needs presented by people who are homeless, all areas and levels of Government need to be on board, to ensure cohesive integrated responses are developed'<sup>3</sup>. Subsequently, Victoria has developed a Youth Homelessness Action Plan including a stage 1 and 2 implementation.

23.7 Youth homelessness is no longer dealt with by only SAAP services - there is also Reconnect and JPET. Early intervention involves schools and a range of community agencies. In the years since the HREOC Inquiry, youth homelessness continued to rise until 2001 and only since then has the increase in the population of homeless young people been arrested and reduced a little. Despite a growth economy, record levels of employment and the lowest unemployment for more than 15 years, 'youth homelessness' is still endemic. We have to ask the question: and 'What would need to be done to effectively eliminate youth homelessness in Australia?

23.8 The NYC recognises that the answer involves setting in place an effective prevention and early intervention response as well as helping those young Australians who are already homeless. Youth policy does not exist in a comprehensive form and where policy exists it has been developed largely in terms of education, training and employment. Despite the National Homelessness Strategy, a misnomer for a relatively small funding program, there has been no over-arching homelessness strategy. The most promising development under SAAP IV was the genuine attempts by some states to develop their own homelessness strategies.

23.9 The states actions suggest that a national framework needs to be developed that of necessity can work on a long-term timeline. The framework needs to be cross-sectoral and cross-departmental to an extent that has not been previously attempted.

23.10 An acceptance that overcoming youth homelessness requires action on several fronts, sustained over a long period of time raises the question as to what structures and processes would be able to sustain the implementation of a national strategy. Bipartisan support has been an informal hallmark of the Australian response to homelessness, although when governments change there are a host of changes in administration and priority. Sometimes change is as simple as renaming and reorganising, while retaining the essential functions of programs that are necessary and basically sound.

## **The concept of social exclusion**

23.11 For a long time, debates about homelessness and disadvantaged were staged around structuralist versus individualist explanations. Individualist accounts focused on the deficiencies or failings of individuals - those individuals whose personal misfortunes or failings are held to largely account for their situation - while explanations emphasising social structure lead to arguments about income distribution via social programs, or progressive taxation. However, researchers often describe homelessness as involving both structural factors and individual issues. In 1975, The Australian Government Commission of Inquiry into Poverty tabled its report, *Poverty in Australia*<sup>4</sup>. This inquiry examined social disadvantage and poverty and established the Henderson poverty line as a

non-judgemental measure of poverty, purely in terms of income. The Henderson inquiry into poverty in Australia was concerned about the distribution and redistribution of income and resources within society. In more recent times, policy talk has focused less on poverty and more on homelessness as an extreme of poverty.

23.12 Levitas<sup>5</sup> discussed several competing discourses about the fact that people in society are unequal. One she described as the ‘moral underclass discourse’ (or MUD) where an individual’s behaviour was held responsible for their situation; prompting educational measures, and social work together with various incentives were as proposed solutions. Blaming youth homeless benefits for causing young people to leave home and the assumptions underpinning much of welfare-to-work reforms in the past 10 years, would generally fall under what has been described as moral underclass discourse.

23.13 A second discourse was named the ‘redistributive egalitarian discourse’ (or RED). This could be regarded as the policy framework of social democratic parties during most of the post-war period, which saw poverty and social exclusion as the result of structural factors in society. Policies were consequently set to try and measure the redistribution of income via taxation or various benefits.

23.14 The third discourse in play was the ‘social integrationist/new labour/ third way discourse’, where rights were balanced by social responsibilities and policies focused on getting people into the labour market, education and training.

23.15 Critiques of the concept of social inclusion have raised concerns about a focus on ‘social cohesion’ rather than ‘social justice’<sup>6</sup>. The new labour policy direction is about ‘social integration’ which deals mainly with participation in the labour market:

*... employment is promoted as the primary route to inclusion, and unemployment (or worklessness) is treated as synonymous to social exclusion, rather than just exclusion from the labour market. ... ‘work’ becomes the cornerstone for social integration and for social cohesion.*<sup>7</sup>

*On the other hand, social inclusion admits a wide range of individual and social factors into a conversation between ‘unequals’. Questions are asked about how people who are poor, unemployed or marginalised in some way can be supported and helped to participate and share in society and the economy. Bradshaw suggests that the initial strict functionalist rhetoric of New Labour has been moderated over time. He says social inclusion does talk about eliminating poverty, but in terms of a broader range of understandings and possibilities.*

## UK New Labour Social Exclusion Unit

23.16 Apart from debates about the theoretical adequacy and practical utility of ‘social inclusion’ there is already some history of the concept-in-practice, firstly under the Blair Labour Government from 1997 to 2007 and - to a much smaller extent - in South Australia. Established within the Cabinet Office, the unit’s brief was described in their own words:

*Our remit is to help improve government action to reduce social exclusion by producing*

*'joined-up solutions to joined-up problems'. We work mainly on specific projects, chosen following consultation with other government departments and suggestions from interested groups. The unit is staffed by a mixture of civil servants from a number of government departments and external secondees from organisations with experience of tackling social exclusion. We work on issues that affect a range of government departments, and do not duplicate work being done elsewhere. We publish reports on specific issues and are involved in other cross-government policy relating to social exclusion. (SEU Brochure)*

23.17 In the early years of the Blair Government the SEU policy work achieved a high profile. Some of the policy topics of 'teenage pregnancy' (1999), 'rough sleeping' (1998), 'truancy and school exclusion' (1998) and 'Bridging the gap – new opportunities for 16-18 year olds not in education, employment or training' (1999) are familiar in an Australian context. On the other hand, a focus on rough sleeping is probably an ill-conceived way of entering the policy debate about dealing with homelessness, Australian jurisdictions generally take a broader view of homelessness than this.

23.18 How effective has the UK Social Exclusion Unit approach met its declared goal of 'joined-up solutions to joined-up problems'? This Inquiry is not in a position to provide a definitive answer to this question. The formation of the unit certainly achieved a high profile for certain policy issues early on, but a 'project by project' modus operandi hardly constructs a long-term approach with sustainable long-term structures and processes. The shift of the unit from the Cabinet Office to the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, in May 2002, has been seen by some as reflecting a somewhat reduced influence. There are no highly visible sustainable cross-sectoral and cross-departmental structures and ways of operating. Lastly, the SEU was born as a top-down initiative by an incoming government. As time passes, it resembles just another taskforce that has done some good policy work, some of which has been vigorously implemented. Would the Social Exclusion Unit survive a change of government, which will inevitably happen at some point within a 20-year time frame? – most probably not.

23.19 The tendency to copy models from overseas has an undignified history in social programs and policy. In some areas, and homelessness is one of them, the leading advances and innovations have happened in Australia, not elsewhere.

23.20 The NYC Inquiry recognises the conceptual utility of broadening the concept of poverty in the direction of 'social exclusion' because of the way that problems such as homelessness can be understood as a complex interaction between social structural factors and individual issues.

23.22 Responding youth homelessness will require a long-term strategy and action plan over 20 to 25 years, and the horizon needs to be the elimination of youth homelessness and homelessness, not reducing the number of rough sleepers in the inner city by relocation or displacement to other sectors of the homeless population.

#### **Recommendation 23.1**

**The NYC Inquiry recommends that the Australian Government and state and territory**

**governments commit to developing a long-term strategy and action plan to eliminate homelessness in Australia.**

#### **Recommendation 23.2**

**The NYC recommends that the Australian Government and state and territory governments create properly resourced compatible data collections across all programs, both Federal and state, that assist homeless people. At the same time, a homelessness identifier should be incorporated in other social programs.**

#### **Recommendation 23.3**

**The NYC Inquiry recommends that the Australian Government and state and territory governments form a National Homelessness Taskforce as a vehicle for developing a national homelessness framework as well as a national strategy and action plan.**

23.23 Broadly, the NYC supports addressing poverty and social exclusion by means of a long-term strategy. However, a caution is issued on uncritically adopting the UK Social Exclusion model into the Australian context. Alternatively, bottom-up approach to developing social inclusion reforms linked to progress on the reform of Commonwealth and state relations is advised, on the understanding that this is a difficult area on which the UK SEU made only modest progress. The NYC suggests a ‘constructivist’ approach whereby the tasks of joining-up policy and government agencies are understood to be a major but difficult agenda requiring sustained effort over time, and for which there are no strikingly successful exemplars.

#### **Recommendation 23.4**

**The NYC Inquiry recommends that a Federal Government Social Inclusion Unit focus on developing a reform agenda for how joined-up government and joined-up policy can be undertaken in an effective and sustainable way across departments and jurisdictions to assist young people who are homeless.**

23.24 Apart from the challenges in ‘whole of government’ and ‘joined up’ government projects and programs, there remain, some serious issues of poor public administration that have adversely affected a number of homelessness programs. Careful forward planning and allowance for salary increases and real cost increases need to be factored into budget planning for all social programs, especially the programs directed to assisting the most vulnerable Australians. When governments seek efficiency dividends from programs across the board in some cases, the effect may not be noticeable. Evidence came to the attention of the Inquiry that suggests noticeable adverse impacts on the ground. Increases in SAAP funding have not kept pace with real cost increases over the past decade, despite all kinds of inventive attempts to do as much with less. The constrained funding regime has put more pressure on community agencies and charitable organisations to raise additional funds. Reconnect services, which usually have two EFTU workers, have been affected as well. Improved public administration, clear standards and greater accountability of the administrative side of social programs needs urgent attention.

#### **Recommendation 23.5**

**The NYC Inquiry recommends that the public administration of all programs for homeless**



young people be reviewed with a view to improving program administration and cost planning for service provision.

The review should address:

- Improved accountability by developing more efficient and streamlined ways of collecting information and reporting on outcomes;
- Adequate real cost indexation to maintain service provision in the face of rising external costs;
- An exemption from the impact of efficiency dividends for programs catering for the most disadvantaged Australians;
- Service models that adequately allow for real cost structures such occupational health and safety, training and professional development and community service salary scale increments;
- A minimum standard of three-year funding agreements.

## 10 POINT ROADMAP FOR YOUTH HOMELESSNESS

23.25 The development and implementation of a framework and a national action plan on homelessness is imperative. One of the lessons from the past ten to fifteen years on how homelessness has been addressed is that policy has been unevenly attended to and there has been no planned approach. Within a no-growth budget, there has been good cooperative oversight of SAAP, but JPET and Reconnect have been developed separately. There is no common data collection and decisions are not strongly coordinated.

23.26 The following 10 points comprise what might be called a 'roadmap'. They are not the only areas for attention but they are must do strategic areas. Implementing the core 10 points of the Roadmap would change the face of youth homelessness in Australia. This will be a complex developmental process requiring policy multi-tasking and new ways of connecting different areas of policy and programs – but all the core ingredients need to be in play. In the first term of the new Government, \$100 million per year would make that possible and demonstrate to the Australian community that 'homelessness' is one of the Government's highest priorities for national action.

### 1. Develop and implement a national framework and National Homelessness Action Plan

23.27 Australia needs a new commitment from Commonwealth and state and territory governments on homelessness, a national framework and a national action plan, including:

- A national aspirational horizon – the goal of eliminating youth homelessness by 2030;
- Appropriate structures and processes designed to work across election cycles in a bipartisan way;

- **Specific targets over the short, medium and long-term;**
- **Strategies that set out realistically how targets will be reached.**
- **A youth-centred focus for service provision and programs;**
- **Review and public monitoring so that progress can be recognised and problems identified against the needs of homeless young people.**

## 2 Affordable housing for young people

23.28 The affordable housing crisis has developed as a result of decades of policy neglect and under-funding. The NYC supports a broad affordable housing strategy as a new framework for explicitly addressing the needs of low income and disadvantaged Australians. Under this approach, there will need to be: (a) a multi-billion dollar investment in public and community housing; (b) taxation incentives to encourage affordable private rental housing, and (c) explicit policies and housing form designs and locations that facilitate access for young people. The NYC is concerned that the interests and needs of young people are appropriately addressed under a new National Affordable Housing Strategy and that the hard work of undertaking planning based on the leading edge Australian housing research is done. The NYC recommends:

- **the development of a new national affordable housing strategy for Australia, with explicit attention to the needs of young people and in particular disadvantaged young people.**

## 3 Refocus service provision on building and resourcing 'communities of services'

23.29 The way governments and departments divide up geographical areas for funding and program delivery is confusing, contradictory and uncoordinated, with little progress since the Burdekin Report in 1989. Building 'communities of services' will require all government departments to work towards agreed compatible geographical templates based on actual communities of people. Large Local Government Areas or clusters of small LGAs are probably the closest spatial unit to actual communities. Community capacity building has entered the rhetoric of the community services, but there is a challenge in how it could be achieved in practice. Building effective local service systems will require resources to advance beyond the current status quo. The exemplars of the School Focused Youth Service or the Youth Support Coordinators combined with some of the Queensland education coordination reforms point the way forward. Resources will be need to support the development phase, but also some resources will be needed to maintain service system coordination once developed. Ultimately whatever is done needs to be available to all communities. An estimated minimum funding goal of \$30 million per year, but implemented over 10 years would require \$3 million/year of additional funds. This is a conservative position that could serve as a realistic starting point. This initiative will require:

- **a refocus of Commonwealth and State/ Territory funding for services and programs on a common community level template;**

- the provision of cross-sectoral/ cross-departmental resources to support the development sustainable 'communities of services'.

#### **4 Prevent homelessness by supporting 'at-risk' families**

23.30 If at-risk families are assisted in a flexible, practical needs-based way before they become homeless, then homelessness can be prevented. A small program known as HOME Advice has demonstrated that this is possible in nine out of 10 cases. About one third of all SAAP clients are families with nearly 55,000 accompanying children, Preventive support to assist at-risk families using a proven model would have a major impact on the number of families entering SAAP. The HOME Advice evaluation estimated that a conservative minimum of \$36 million would be required but suggested more realistic funding of \$60-90 million per year. An investment of \$4.5 million per year of additional funds would achieve a position of \$60 million dollars over a decade.

- progressively expand the HOME Advice program as a preventive response to homelessness for families at risk of becoming homeless to at least \$60m per year.

#### **5. Resource early intervention for at risk young people.**

23.31 School-based early intervention responses for recently homelessness young people, such as the Reconnect program and other related early intervention support services, have been effective in reducing homelessness. Researchers found that the reduction in the number of homeless 12-18 year olds from 26,060 in 2001 to 21,940 in 2006 is mostly attributed to 'early intervention'. Early intervention works but not enough is being done to have the effect it could have, so the Commonwealth Government needs to:

- treble Reconnect (from \$20 to \$60 million per year) to reach a larger proportion of the at-risk population and ensure that every community in the nation has sufficient early intervention capacity to impact on the number of young people at-risk of homelessness or recently homeless

#### **6. A new national approach for the care and protection of children in all states and territories**

23.32 Australia's Care and Protection system is in crisis. The Commonwealth Government to date has had little responsibility for care and protection, which has been a state responsibility. State programs are under-resourced and leaving care support needs major development. The lack of a national cooperative approach and timid reform in the face of potentially adverse media are major barriers. A courageous and radical national review of care and protection is urgent. It is not possible to estimate how much this would cost, but it is likely to require a significant increase in current expenditure. Young people who have been in State Care are heavily over-represented in the population of homeless youth. Immediate action is required. The NYC urges immediate action including:

- a full Human Rights and Equal Opportunity inquiry to expose the issues and develop proposals for a national response.

- a strengthening of care and protection for at-risk 12-17 year olds;
- urgent remedial attention to staff resources and incentives for experienced staff to remain in a critical but difficult area;
- leaving care support on a needs-basis for all young people exiting care and protection..

## 7 Ensure supported accommodation is accessible in all communities

23.33 Supported accommodation (ie SAAP) remains a core component of Australia's response to homelessness and an exemplar of innovative diversity by international standards, despite being in a no real growth position for over a decade. Strengthening this sector will ensure that every community has the capacity for a supported accommodation response to youth homelessness. An estimate for an adequate extent of community based supported accommodation might well be closer to \$500-600 million per year compared to \$348 million currently, and youth services would comprise approximately \$170-200 million annually. About one third of SAAP services are for young people so approximately an additional \$50 million for youth services would be required to:

- expand supported accommodation using a national community template to ensure that every community can adequately provide supported accommodation for young people in need.

## 8 Redevelop employment, drug and alcohol and mental health programs for homeless young people

23.34 Employment is central to a sustainable livelihood for homeless young people. A continuum of labour market support programs need to be developed which address education barriers to employment and prepare young people for training, provide vocational training and assist young homeless people to engage with the labour market. The absence of specialist and appropriate labour market options for disadvantaged young people has ensured that homeless young people have been largely excluded from participation in the 'full-employment' Australian economy.

23.35 Existing options for drug and alcohol services or mental health services are too often unable to provide timely assistance and treatment or are unable to accommodate young people while they are dealing with drug and alcohol issues.

23.36 Drug treatment services for young people are uneven around Australia. In Victoria, drug services are funded to a level of \$15-16 million per year. An additional \$5 million per year would achieve state-wide coverage as well as providing sufficient outreach services at current levels of need. Other states spend less than Victoria. The proposed expansion of both mental health services and drug and alcohol programs will serve not just homeless young people but any young person, who need this kind of assistance.

23.37 A large amount of public funds are expended already in Job Network and on unemployment benefits. While we have not costed the employment support required by

homeless young people, a major part of these funds could be found by reallocations of expenditures elsewhere. To respond in these crucial areas, the NYC calls for:

- **the development a national system of accessible drug and alcohol services for young people. National funding of an estimated \$100 million would be required to deploy a system adequate to meet existing need, with an urgent need for \$20 million initially.**
- **the development of a national program at an estimated cost of \$25 million, to work intensively with homeless young people who have mental health issues, their families and the workers who support them.**
- **the construction a continuum of employment programs for homeless young people incorporating JPET and offering appropriate foundation education, training, vocational options as well as new models of supported employment that build new links between support, accommodation, and education and employment programs.**

## **9 A new form of youth housing which links housing to education, training and employment programs**

23.38 An Australian version of the UK/ European Foyer youth housing model should to be developed to link accommodation with other support, particularly education and training. Other initiatives should include accommodation for homeless school students, and 'boarding school' projects linked to Indigenous communities. The total extent of this type of housing will need to be assessed in terms of need and demand and what the sustainable expansion of this housing might need to be. One third of the homeless are young people. Based on the Government's election promise of housing for the homeless, the NYC argues that:

- **one third of the \$150 million committed for housing for homeless people should be applied to develop a new layer of youth housing that is connected to education, training and employment.**

## **10 Post-vention support**

23.39 Returning to homelessness is common for young people because even after they find housing, problems can reoccur. Post-vention support would ensure that recycling back into homelessness is minimised. A new type of flexible, tailored, post-vention outreach support will ensure young people can sustain their independent living arrangements. It will radically improve the outcomes of supported accommodation programs. Every homeless young person moving beyond supported accommodation should be able to access this kind of support. We have estimated that a substantial national capacity could be created for somewhere between \$30-50 million - \$35 million for the purpose of calculations. Implemented over 10 years, this would be \$3.5 million of additional funds every year for a decade. The NYC proposes that:

- **all young people moving from SAAP into some form of independent living should receive needs-based outreach support (an estimated \$30-50 million per year would be required for a fully developed national response).**

23.40 In terms of some preliminary costings where there is existing evidence or a sufficient basis for making estimates, it would approximately cost \$1 billion in new money over a decade, \$100 million in the first term of the new Federal Government after the 2007 election result, and approximately \$20 million additional funds every year. This notional estimate excludes the costs associated with a reform of the care and protection systems around Australia, and the additional services required in mental health and drug and alcohol fields to more effectively service the significant group of their clients who are homeless young people. The total cost of redressing the affordability of housing for young people could not reasonably be estimated at the time of this report, but it will be a considerable sum, and also, the cost of reformed employment services for homeless young people has not been estimated. The cost of not doing what needs to be done will be a large cost to the community into the future.

## ENDNOTES

- 1 [www.facsia.gov.au/internet/facsinternet.nsf/aboutfacs/programs/house-nhs\\_home.htm](http://www.facsia.gov.au/internet/facsinternet.nsf/aboutfacs/programs/house-nhs_home.htm)
- 2 Ibid.
- 3 Tony Newman (2003) Paper to the 3rd national Homelessness Conference 'Beyond the Divide.
- 4 Henderson, R. (1975) *Poverty in Australia: Main report Volume 1*, Canberra: Australian Government Publishing Service.
- 5 Levitas, R. (1998) *The Inclusive Society? Social Exclusion and New Labour*, Basingstoke: Palgrave.
- 6 See Lister, R. (1998) 'From equality to social exclusion: New Labour and the welfare state', *Critical Social Policy*, 18(2) pp. 215-226; and Jordan, B. (1996) *A theory of Poverty and Social Exclusion*, Cambridge: Polity.
- 7 Alexiadou, N. (2002) 'Social inclusion and social exclusion in England: tensions in education policy', *Journal of Education Policy*, (17)1, pp.71-86.

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## Legislation

Industrial Relations (Child Employment) Act 2006 (NSW).

Summary Offences Act NT.

## Appendix A    Witnesses to the NYC Inquiry

### **28/03/07    Courthouse Youth Arts Centre, Geelong, Victoria**

Mal Douglas	Barwon Youth
Denise Berg	Salvation Army Kardinia Women's Services Network
Mike Kelly	Time for Youth
Lloyd Owen	Time for Youth
John Blomfield	Time for Youth
Anna Forsythe	Council for Homeless Persons
Melissa O'Shea	Jigsaw Young Persons Health Service
Leigh Bartlett	BATForce
Max Broadley	Youth Substance Abuse Service, Barwon South West Region
Monica Butler	Youth Development Unit, City of Greater Geelong
Jane Wager	Community Development Unit, City of Greater Geelong
Jill Whelan	Nutrition for Health, Time for Youth
Sue Smith	Geelong Reconnect, MacKillop Family Services
Simon Buggy	Mental Illness Fellowship
David Decolongon	Collins Place Residential Program, Mental Illness Fellowship
Steve Richards	Homeless Outreach Psychiatric Services, Barwon Health

### **27/03/07    Warnambool Entertainment Centre, Warnambool, Victoria**

Young Person	Private Hearing
Erin Bubb	Community Connections
Renee Duncan	Community Connections
Elizabeth Schepisi	Community Connections
Francis Broekman	Brophy Family and Youth Services
Peter Flanagan	Brophy Family and Youth Services
Donna Wynters	Brophy Family and Youth Services
Marion Noye	Brophy Family and Youth Services
Ruth Isabel	Brophy Family and Youth Services
Daryl Fitzgibbon	Western Regional Alcohol and Drug Service
Marina Lewis	Barwon South West Homelessness Network
Karen Glennen	Barwon South West Children's Resource Network
Sam Sharp	Portland District Health Service
Rob Shepherdson	Portland Housing Programme
Carmen Scott	Portland Housing Programme
Wendy Rotumah	Winda-Mara Aboriginal Corporation

### **03/04/07    Mirambeena Resort, Darwin, NT**

Ann Buxton	Anglicare NT
Sandi Ford	Youth Housing, Anglicare NT
Christa Hilton	YWCA Darwin
Bill Groom	YWCA Darwin

Nina Lemos	YWCA Darwin
Trudy Lee	Health Connections for Youth, Anglicare NT
Lenore Dembski	Aboriginal Hostels Ltd

**04/04/07 Mirambeena Resort, Darwin, NT**

Kelly Holliday	Connect, Anglicare NT
Kay Gehan	Connect, Anglicare NT
Tania Morse	Connect, Anglicare NT
Yianna Paterakis	DAISY, Centacare NT
Trevor Chapman	DAISY, Centacare NT
Susan Crane	Dawn House
Erin Evans	Taminmin High School
Melinda Hazel	Taminmin High School
Pauline Tewhata	Palmerston High School
John Baldock	Palmerston High School
Young Person	
Young Person	
Young Person	
Young Person	

**10/04/07 Brisbane City Hall, Brisbane, Queensland**

Maria Leebeek	Queensland Youth Housing Coalition Incorporated
Siyavash Doostkhah	Youth Affairs Network of Queensland
David Powell	Youth Affairs Network of Queensland
Terri Phillips	Aurala, Save the Children Fund, Queensland Branch
Nikki Stevens	Caloundra Youth Focus
Tracy Parker	Caloundra Youth Focus
Diane Fletcher	BABI Youth and Family Support
Robyn Pattison	BABI Youth and Family Support
Angela Barnes	Brisbane Youth Service
Young Person	
Young Person	
Young Person	
Monica Taylor	Homeless Persons' Legal Clinic, Queensland Public Interest Law Clearing House
Emmanuel Pappas	Homeless Persons' Legal Clinic, Queensland Public Interest Law Clearing House

**11/04/07 Brisbane City Hall, Brisbane, Queensland**

Margaret Hornagold	Darumbal Community Youth Services
Gary Penfold	Queensland Shelter
Lee-Anne Hoyer	Youth Advocacy Centre
Damian Bartholomew	Youth Advocacy Centre
Alison Smith	Young Women's Place
Dianne Auchettl	Young Women's Place
Jill McKay	Zig Zag Young Women's Resource Centre
Morrie O'Connor	Community Living Association

Shirley Pepler Young Person Young Person Lisa Thorpy Young Person	Young Parents Program   Open Doors Youth Service
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#### **12/04/07 QCWA Denham Townsville**

Denise Douglas	Bama Ngappi Ngappi Aboriginal Corporation
Brooke Gelder	Relationships Australia, Townsville and Thuringowa
Margaret Miln	Iona House, Lifeline North Queensland
Danielle Charge	Child & Youth Mental Health Services, Queensland Health
Lisa Phelan	Child & Youth Mental Health Services, Queensland Health
Joanne Solomon	Sisters Inside
Donna Cobbo	Mothers Crying Out for Help Group
Tracey French	Sharehouse Youth Accommodation
Anonymous	
Farvardin Daliri	Migrant Resource Centre, Townsville
Dorothy Vakacautadra	Youth Shelter Program, Townsville Aboriginal and Islanders Health Services
Angie Akee	Townsville Aboriginal and Islanders Health Services
Billo Oui	VSM Place of Safety, Townsville Aboriginal and Islanders Health Services
Helen Ellery	Reconnect Townsville, Queensland Youth Services
Jacek Zuchowski	Reconnect Townsville, Queensland Youth Services

#### **16.04.07 Citigate Sebel, Sydney, NSW**

Michael Coffey	Youth Accommodation Association of NSW
Donna Curtis	Youth Accommodation Association of NSW
Anne Hampshire	Mission Australia
Evelyne Tadros	Mission Australia
An Van Tran	Reconnect Punchbowl, Mission Australia
Laurie Matthews	Caretakers Cottage
Kevin Crowe	Southern Youth and Family Services, Wollongong
Kristen Day	Southern Youth and Family Services, Wollongong
Eleonore Johansson	Southern Youth and Family Services, Wollongong
David Harvey	Shire Wide Youth Services
Debbie Hadfield	Shire Wide Youth Services
Donna Curtis	Shire Wide Youth Services
Vanessa D'Souza	NSW Association for Adolescent Health
Karen Legge	Crossroads Youth Health Service

#### **17/04/07 Citigate Sebel, Sydney, NSW**

Graeme Pringle	Youth Drug and Alcohol Service, Sydney West Area Health Services
Jimi Wollumbin	The Bare Foot Doctors
Paul Moulds	Salvation Army Oasis Youth Support Network
Min Bonwick	Key College, Youth Off The Streets

Young Person	
Young Person	
Bernadette Eviston	Key College, Youth Off The Streets
Sharon Callaghan	Illawarra Legal Centre
Cindi Petersen	Kings Cross Youth At Risk Project
Jane Sanders	Shopfront Youth Legal Centre
Rebecca Howe	The Bridge Youth Service

#### **18/04/07 Historic Council Chambers, Wagga Wagga, NSW**

Annette Jarvis	Riverina Division of General Practice
Narelle Johnson	RCC Employment & Training
Kelly Price	Staysafe, YES Youth and Family Services
Peter Quarmbay	Edel Quinn Men's Shelter, St Vincent de Paul
Pat Fogarty	Reconnect, Vinnies Services Deniliquin
Jane Ludeman	Reconnect, Vinnies Services Deniliquin
Viv King	Reconnect, Vinnies Services Deniliquin
Michelle Wilson	Verity House, Mission Australia
Brenda Kerry	Housing Community Assistance Program, Wagga Wagga City Council
Shane Atkinson	Community Services, Wagga Wagga City Council
Michelle Bray	Community Services, Wagga Wagga City Council
Jason Emmins	Riverina Murray Department of Juvenile Justice Community Services, Wagga Wagga Office
Clair Swan	Campbell Page
Barbara Smith	Southern Riverina Youth Support Services

#### **19/04/07 Youth in the City, Canberra, ACT**

Rhonda Fuzzard	Canberra Youth Refuge
Andy Miles	Transition Program, Barnardos Australia
Carol Mead	Directions ACT
Tim Moore	Institute of Child Protection Studies, Australian Catholic University
Morag McArthur	Institute of Child Protection Studies, Australian Catholic University
Peter Schwarz	Open Family
Marilyn Graham	Lowana Youth Services
Kim Peters	Lowana Youth Services
Brett Pridmore	Belleden Youth Services and Queanbeyan Youth Services, Anglicare Canberra and Goulburn
Alison Lawrence	Youth in the City, Anglicare Canberra and Goulburn
Jenelle Irwin	Anglicare Canberra and Goulburn
Manja Visschedijk	YWCA Canberra

#### **20/04/07 Youth in the City, Canberra, ACT**

Keely Taylor	JPET, Centacare Canberra
Nancy Pitto	Reconnect, Centacare Canberra
Caroline Bradley	Homelinx, Centacare Canberra
Mark Petricivic	Youth and Wellbeing, Centacare Canberra
Joy Whitcombe	Oasis Youth Residential Service, Salvation Army



Shannon Pickles	St Vincent de Paul Family Service
Ara Cresswell	ACT Council of Social Service
Meredith Hunter	Youth Coalition of the ACT
Luke Bo'sher	Youth Coalition of the ACT
Leanne Craze	Mental Health Community Coalition ACT

**23/04/07 Fitzroy Town Hall, Melbourne, Victoria**

Melika Chiswell	Young People's Health Service
Tim Fry	Young People's Health Service
Donna Eade	Young People's Health Service
Claire Nyblom	Melbourne City Mission
Rob Nabben	Melbourne City Mission
Paul Hogan	Fitzroy Homeless Youth Program, Youth and Family Services, Salvation Army Crossroads
Janet Jukes	Salvation Army Crossroads
Anne Mitchell	Gay and Lesbian Health Victoria
Lynne Hillier	Australian Research Centre for Sex, Health and Society
Sue Carlile	Family Access Network
Kate Brady	CREATE Foundation
Young Person	
Young Person	
Young Person	
Susan Barton	Lighthouse Foundation
Greg Lolas	Lighthouse Foundation
Salli Hickford	City North West Youth Substance Abuse Service
Horace Wansborough	City North West Youth Substance Abuse Service
Mark Young	Open Family Australia
Sally Elizabeth	Sandridge Program and Northern Regional Youth Homelessness Network
Derek Wilson	Footscray Youth Housing Group

**24/04/07 Fitzroy Town Hall, Melbourne, Victoria**

Deb Tsorbaris	Council To Homeless Persons
Anna Forsyth	Council To Homeless Persons
Parent	
Young Person	
Georgie Ferrari	Youth Affairs Council of Victoria
Jen Rose	Youth Affairs Council of Victoria
Shelley Mallett	Project i, Key Centre for Women's Health in Society, Melbourne University
Glenys James	North East Support and Action for Youth
Rosemary Lachelini	Southern Ethnic Advisory & Advocacy Council
Walda Blow	Margaret Tucker Hostel
Alistair Sandison	Primary Health Branch, Community Health Unit, DHS, Victoria
Tony Keenan	Hanover Welfare Services
Andrew Hollows	Hanover Welfare Services
Ross Egleton	Kids Under Cover
Jo Swift	Kids Under Cover

John Benton	Eco Renovation and Design
Mathew Tinkler	PILCH Homeless Persons' Legal Clinic
John-Paul Cashen	PILCH Homeless Persons' Legal Clinic
Rebecca Johnson	Eastern Health Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service
Helen Mildred	Eastern Health Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service
Ric Pawsey	Berry Street Take Two

#### **26/04/07    Adelaide Town Hall, Adelaide, South Australia**

Jennifer Duncan	Youth Affairs Council of South Australia
Carmen Garcia	Multicultural Youth SA
Gillian Anderson	Youth Agency, Service to Youth Council
Leanne Cornell-March	Trace A Place, Service to Youth Council
Margo Johnson	Shelter SA
Janet Taylor	Community Development, Port Adelaide Enfield Council
Trevor Cresswell	Community Development, Port Adelaide Enfield Council
Cheryl Axleby	Metropolitan Aboriginal Youth & Family Services
Paul Mackowski	Metropolitan Aboriginal Youth & Family Services
Trevor Harradine	Metropolitan Aboriginal Youth & Family Services

#### **27/04/07    Adelaide Town Hall, Adelaide, South Australia**

David Tully	Sidestreet, UnitingCare Wesley Adelaide
Joseph Gannon	Streetlink, UnitingCare Wesley Adelaide
Bill Trewartha	Multicultural Communities Council of South Australia
Fong Ung	SE Asian Reconnect, Multicultural Communities Council of South Australia
Cathy Rosa	Southern Junction Community Services
Kym McIntosh	Southern Junction Community Services
Wendy Sutton	ShopFront Youth Health & Information Service
Samantha Munro	ShopFront Youth Health & Information Service
Graham Holloway	Anglican Community Care, Mt Gambier

#### **03/05/07    Hobart Town Hall, Hobart, Tas**

Jed Donoghue	Salvation Army
Jenny Begent	Salvation Army
Steven Weinert	Accommodation Support Service, Anglicare Tasmania
Robert Favelle-Dickson	Mental Health Services, Anglicare Tasmania
Jill Chisholm	Hobart College
Jane Shearing	Elizabeth College
Anne Hamilton	Migrant Resource Centre Southern Tasmania
Anne Hurd	Annie Kenney Young Women's Refuge
Jenny Dodge	Annie Kenney Young Women's Refuge
Pip Allwright	Isolated Children's Parents' Association
Arlette Mercae	Alted, Elizabeth College
Gavin Evans	Oenghus Youth Services
Ian Stokes	Family Services Unit, Colony 47
Debbie Hindle	Youth Services Unit, Colony 47

Susan Bailey	Youth Services Unit, Colony 47
Stephen Donnet-Jones	CREATE Foundation
Young Person	

**04/05/07 Launceston Town Hall, Launceston, Tas**

Debbie Shearim	Reconnect Round 2, Relationships Australia
Max Beffell	Reconnect Round 2, Relationships Australia
Jeremy Davis	Youth Futures
Lisa Legge	Youth Futures
Ria Brink	Karinya Young Womyn's Service
Cinnamon Whatley	Karinya Young Womyn's Service
Gordon Melsom	Australian Federation of Homelessness Organisations
Natalie Heiniger	Launceston College
John Karama	Migrant Resource Centre Northern Tasmania
Beth Mulligan	The Corner Youth Health Centre, General Practice North
Keith Treasure	Launceston City Mission
Louise Dennis	Placement and Support Service, Anglicare Tasmania
Alison Roberts	Personal Support Program, Anglicare Tasmania
Paul Mallett	Family Matters, Anglicare Tasmania
Clare Thompson	My Place, Anglicare Tasmania
Lynne Watson	Access, Anglicare Tasmania
Kate Oliver	Mental Health, Anglicare Tasmania
Shane Ellings	Access, Anglicare Tasmania
Bernice Shepherd	Personal Support Program, Anglicare Tasmania
Mardie Blair	JPET, Anglicare Tasmania

**07/06/07 Subiaco Arts Centre, Perth, WA**

Amy Hackett	Joondalup Youth Support Services
Linda Sims	Joondalup Youth Support Services
Brett Hill	Aboriginal Hostels Limited
Terry Cornwall	Community Representative, Aboriginal Hostels Limited
Audrey Turner	Youth Legal Service
Sharon Newman	Youth Legal Service
Shauna Gaebler	Street Doctor and Mobile Access Centre, Perth Primary Care Network
Thierrys Barlaen	Street Doctor and Mobile Access Centre, Perth Primary Care Network
Deborah Ireson	Adolescent Mothers Support Service and Innovative Health Services for Homeless Youth
Michael Robinson	Child and Adolescent Health Service, Western Australian Department of Health
Paul Pendergast	Shelter WA
Jim Anthony	Shelter WA
Chris Summerfield	Drug ARM WA
Sylvia Mollasi	Salvation Army Crossroads West
Andrea Brookfield	Salvation Army Crossroads West
Josephine Casserly	Horizon House Project, St John of God Foundation
Michael Board	Horizon House Project, St John of God Foundation
Philippa Boldy	Youth Services, Anglicare WA

Andrew Hall	Community Services, Anglicare WA
Rosie Logie	YES! Housing, Anglicare WA
Stephan Lund	Teenshare, Anglicare WA
Margaret Findson	Salvation Army Crossroads West and Balga Community Services
Yvonne Hunt	Salvation Army Crossroads West and Balga Community Services
Steve Rowe	Salvation Army Crossroads West
Joni Kieft	Youth Affairs Council of WA

#### **08/06/07 Subiaco Arts Centre, Perth, WA**

Nola Kunnen	Alcoa Research Centre for Stronger Communities, Curtin University
Heather Gare	Fusion Australia
Danielle Tilbrook	Passages Resource Centre
Paul Everall	Mercy Family and Community Services, MercyCare
Daniele McGrath	Fremantle GP Network
Julie Creighton	Fremantle GP Network
Michael Robinson	Child and Adolescent Health Service, Western Australian Department of Health
Tracey Timms	Next Step Youth Drug and Alcohol Services
George Davies	Perth Inner City Youth Service
Young Person	
Young Person	
Young Person	
Young Person	
Young Person	
Young Person	

#### **25/06/07 Alice Springs Youth Centre, Alice Springs, NT**

John Adams	Tangentyere Council
Adrian Scholtes	Tangentyere Council
Tony Corcoran	Social and Emotional Wellbeing Program, Central Australian Aboriginal Congress
Gerard Waterford	Social and Emotional Wellbeing Program, Central Australian Aboriginal Congress
Shirley Baker	Towards Independence Program
Christine Pilbrow	Aboriginal Program
Tracey McNee	Alice Springs Youth Accommodation and Support Services
Will MacGregor	Bush Mob Inc
Wayne Clarke	Bush Mob Inc
Claudia Manu-	Mental Health Association of Central Australia
Preston	
Young Person	
Jonathan Pilbrow	NT Shelter and NT Council of Social Service

Sarah Holder  
Margaret Orr  
Marie Briscoe  
George Peckham  
Kath Broadbent  
Ann Tregea  
Mary Prunty

Waltja Tjutangku Palyapayi Aboriginal Corporation  
Waltja Tjutangku Palyapayi Aboriginal Corporation  
Waltja Tjutangku Palyapayi Aboriginal Corporation  
Waltja Tjutangku Palyapayi Aboriginal Corporation  
Drug and Alcohol Services Association  
Gap Youth Centre Aboriginal Corporation  
Holyoake Alice Springs

## Appendix B    Written submissions

<b>NO.</b>	<b>DATE RECEIVED</b>	<b>NAME</b>
1	27 March 2007	Barwon South West Homelessness Network, VIC
2	27 March 2007	Edmund Rice Education, Flexible Learning Centres, QLD
3	2 April 2007	Anglicare Community Care, SA
4	9 April 2007	Greta Angel
5	12 April 2007	Alice Thompson, QLD
6	16 April 2007	Community Living Association, QLD
7	20 April 2007	Craze Lateral Solutions, NSW
8	23 April 2007	Lighthouse Foundation, VIC
9	24 April 2007	John Benton, VIC
10	27 April 2007	Central Gippsland Regional Youth Affairs Network, VIC
11	4 May 2007	Hobart College, TAS
12	7 May 2007	Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency Co-op, VIC
13	7 May 2007	Oenghus Youth Services and Alted Elizabeth College, TAS
14	9 May 2007	AI, TAS
15	10 May 2007	St John's Youth Services, SA
16	15 May 2007	Barbara Reeckman, VIC
17	21 May 2007	Department for Families and Communities & Office for Youth, Government of South Australia, SA
18	23 May 2007	Megan Munro, ACT
19	28 May 2007	Open Family Australia, VIC
20	29 May 2007	Bruce Taylor, QLD
21	29 May 2007	V. D. Burnett, Trustee of the Estate of G. C. Burnett, QLD
22	6 June 2007	Young Women's Place, QLD
23	6 June 2007	Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute, VIC
24	6 June 2007	YouthLaw, Young People's Legal Rights Centre, VIC
25	6 June 2007	Illawarra Legal Centre, NSW
26	10 June 2007	Community Links Wollondilly, NSW
27	10 June 2007	Melbourne Youth Support Service, VIC
28	10 June 2007	Living Water Uniting Church, NT
29	11 June 2007	Swan City Youth Service, WA
30	12 June 2007	Centacare Wagga Wagga, NSW
31	13 June 2007	Jennifer Robertson, VIC
32	14 June 2007	Karinya Young Womyn's Service, TAS
33	14 June 2007	Emma Dowden, NSW
34	14 June 2007	The Salvation Army Social Housing Service (Hamilton), VIC
35	15 June 2007	Anglicare, WA
36	15 June 2007	YP4, VIC
37	15 June 2007	South Port Community Housing Group, VIC
38	15 June 2007	Association of Childrens Welfare Agencies, NSW
39	15 June 2007	Office of Housing, DHS, Victorian Government, VIC
40	15 June 2007	Brisbane Homelessness Taskforce and Queensland Shelter

41	15 June 2007	Barnardos Australia, NSW
42	15 June 2007	Australian Federation of Homelessness Organisations, ACT
43	15 June 2007	Refugee Youth Issues Network of South Australia, SA
44	15 June 2007	Mission Australia, NSW
45	15 June 2007	Youth Network of Tasmania, Shelter Tasmania and Tasmania Council of Social Service, TAS
46	15 June 2007	Anglicare Tasmania, TAS
47	15 June 2007	Hanover Welfare Services, VIC
48	15 June 2007	Child and Adolescent Health Service, WA Dept Health, WA
49	15 June 2007	The Salvation Army Australia Southern Territory, VIC
50	15 June 2007	HomeGround Services, VIC
51	15 June 2007	Starting Out, Connections Child, Youth & Family Services, UnitingCare, VIC
52	15 June 2007	The Salvation Army, TAS
53	15 June 2007	Concerned Workers, TAS
54	15 June 2007	Kyabra Community Association, QLD
55	18 June 2007	Twenty10 GLBT Youth Support, NSW
56	18 June 2007	Department of Housing and Works, WA Government, WA
57	18 June 2007	Ministers Youth Council, Office for Youth, SA Government
58	19 June 2007	Anglicare, Diocese of Sydney, NSW
59	19 June 2007	Family Access Network, VIC
60	21 June 2007	Frontyard Youth Services, VIC
61	21 June 2007	Southern Youth and Family Services, NSW
62	22 June 2007	Southern Junction Community Services, SA
63	22 June 2007	NSW Association for Adolescent Health, NSW
64	22 June 2007	Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare, VIC
65	22 June 2007	Centre for Multicultural Youth Issues, National Multicultural Youth Issues Network of Australia, VIC
66	22 June 2007	Homeless Persons' Legal Clinic, Queensland Public Interest Law Clearing House with Brisbane Youth Service, Salvation Army Youth Outreach Service, Australian Red Cross, QLD
67	22 June 2007	Shopfront Youth Legal Centre, NSW
68	25 June 2007	Key College, Youth Off The Streets, NSW
69	23 July 2007	Tasmania Government, TAS
70	13 June 2007	Young Parents Program, QLD
71	14 June 2007	Wollongong Youth Services, Wollongong City Council, NSW
72	14 June 2007	At Risk Research and Outreach Service, Community Living, Brisbane Youth Service with QPILCH, YAC/YBASS, QYHC, Peakcare/CREATE, YANQ, Young Parents Program, Zig Zag Young Women's Resource Centre, Young Workers Advisory Service, YSC Hub Facilitators, QLD
74	18 June 2007	Service to Youth Council, SA
75	28 June 2007	Headspace, National Youth Mental Health Foundation, VIC
76	28 June 2007	Footscray Youth Housing Group, VIC

77	29 June 2007	Department of Education, Training and the Arts, Queensland Government
78	29 June 2007	UnitingCare Burnside, NSW
79	29 June 2007	Youth Affairs Council of South Australia, SA
80	5 July 2007	Family and Children's Services Branch, NT Department of Health and Community Services, NT
81	5 July 2007	City of Boroondara, VIC
82	5 July 2007	Department for Child Protection, WA Government, WA
83	6 July 2007	The Bridge Youth Service, NSW
84	8 July 2007	Craig Donnelly-Wells, QLD
85	12 July 2007	Council to Homeless Persons, Youth Affairs Council of Victoria and Project i (Key Centre for Women's Health in Society), VIC
86	25 July 2007	Melbourne Citymission, VIC
87	25 July 2007	Youth Accommodation Association, NSW
88	27 July 2007	Waltja Tjutanku Palyapayi Aboriginal Corporation, NT
89	30 July 2007	Sonia James, WA
90	13 August 2007	St Vincent de Paul Society, ACT
91	20 August 2007	New South Wales Department of Housing, NSW



## Appendix C Policy forums

DATE	NAME	FACILITATOR
19 July 2007	WA IHSY Service Providers' Forum	Michael Robinson, Child and Adolescent Health Service, Western Australian Department of Health
14 August 2007	NYC Sydney Policy Forum	David MacKenzie, NYC Commissioner
15 August 2007	NYC Melbourne Policy Forum	David MacKenzie, NYC Commissioner
24 October 2007	North Sydney Area Forum	Michael Coffey, Youth Accommodation Association of NSW